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**Pilgrims of Conscience:
Quests for Morality and Self-Knowledge
in the Fiction of Robin Jenkins**

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**In fulfilment of the degree of Ph.D.
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September 2001**



Abstract

Quests for Morality and Self-Knowledge in the Fiction of Robin Jenkins (1912-)

The thesis aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Robin Jenkins's literary achievement, with specific focus on the issues of self-discovery and morality as presented in his work. It is divided into five main parts, which include an introduction and conclusion. Parts II, III and IV are each subdivided into chapters that deal with individual novels and short stories by Jenkins.

Whilst explaining the aims and structure of the thesis, the introduction also provides some background information on Jenkins's life, character, and views, discusses possible influences on his work, and comments on Jenkins's place in Scottish and European literary and intellectual thought.

Part II deals with Jenkins's early Scottish novels (1950-1963). It aims to establish the emergence and growth of different types of the pilgrim figure in Jenkins's fiction, as well as to introduce other issues that are central to Jenkins's overall analysis of human morality.

Part III discusses Jenkins's foreign fiction (1960-1974). It examines Jenkins's treatment of the imperial theme in a historical and literary context, and discusses some aspects of postcolonial theory in relation to Jenkins's analysis of cultural and racial tensions between Empire and colony. It further establishes Jenkins's interest in the limits of human moral capacity, highlights the importance of individual self-discovery in his character portrayals, and suggests that the universality of human moral perception and experience is central to his work.

Part IV deals with Jenkins's later Scottish fiction (1968-2000). It suggests that Jenkins's later fiction both repeats and diverges from his earlier work, and that the later narratives are marked by greater authorial detachment and narrative ambivalence than the earlier work. It then discusses how Jenkins continues to address issues of self-discovery and morality, as well as comments on the increasingly self-reflective nature of his most recent fiction.

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**Dedicated to my father and mother
and to the memory of my grandfather**

**Tileinkað foreldrum mínum á Steinstúni
og einnig minningu Gísla afa míns**

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Declaration

This thesis represents my own unassisted work, and no part of it has been submitted previously for any academic qualification. The views expressed are my own and not those of the University of Glasgow.

Ingibjörg Ágútsdóttir

List of Abbreviations

In March 1997, Robin Jenkins granted me an interview at his home in Toward. This interview was published in 1999 as 'A Truthful Scot', in *In Scotland* 1 (Autumn 1999), pages 13-22. The interview is referred to throughout the thesis, in endnotes and main text, as Personal Interview.

The fictional works of Robin Jenkins are abbreviated throughout as follows:

So Gaily Sings the Lark (1950) – *GSL*
Happy for the Child (1953) – *HC*
The Thistle and the Grail (1954) – *TAG*
The Cone-Gatherers (1955) – *CG*
Guests of War (1956) – *GOW*
The Missionaries (1957) – *TM*
The Changeling (1958) – *TC*
Love is a Fervent Fire (1959) – *LFF*
Some Kind of Grace (1960) – *SKG*
Dust on the Paw (1961) – *DOP*
The Tiger of Gold (1962) – *TG*
A Love of Innocence (1963) – *LOI*
The Sardana Dancers (1964) – *SD*
A Very Scotch Affair (1968) – *VSA*
The Holy Tree (1969) – *HT*
The Expatriates (1971) – *TE*
A Toast to the Lord (1972) – *TTL*
A Far Cry From Bowmore & Other Stories (1973) – *FC*
A Figure of Fun (1974) – *FOF*
A Would-Be Saint (1978) – *WBS*
Fergus Lamont (1979) – *FL*
The Awakening of George Darroch (1985) – *GD*
Just Duffy (1988) – *JD*
Poverty Castle (1991) – *PC*
Willie Hogg (1993) – *WH*
Leila (1995) – *L*
Lunderston Tales (1996) – *LT*
Matthew and Sheila (1998) – *MS*
Poor Angus (2000) – *PA*
Childish Things (2001) – *CT*

Part I: Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to provide a comprehensive overview of the fiction of Robin Jenkins, focusing on the issues of self-discovery and morality as presented in his work. 38 years of age when he published his first novel, *So Gaily Sings the Lark*, in 1950, Jenkins has since published thirty fictional works, the latest of which, *Childish Things*, came out when this thesis was in the final stages of composition (April 2001).¹ Yet although his writing has been praised by several literary critics,² Jenkins has not yet received his due recognition, even in academic circles. In addition, a significant number of his published novels, especially from the earlier period of his career, have been largely ignored, the only available criticism found in either summary overviews of Jenkins's work or in newspaper reviews.³ This thesis hopes to fill a significant gap in studies of Scottish and British modern literature as the first definitive critical study to deal with the entire range of Jenkins's fiction.

In his work, Jenkins explores themes and issues such as the influence of Calvinism on Scottish society, the question of urban versus rural values, the vulnerability of children and the fragile nature of innocence, the effects of class division and the injustices of capitalist ideology, the cruelty and futility of war, and humanity's fallen state in a world of hypocrisy and spiritual lassitude. In the case of the novels set abroad, he explores racial prejudice and cultural conflict in the context of the dubious legacy of British imperialism. Jenkins's work portrays human isolation and the difficulties of communication in a disillusioned, mechanised world, and highlights the inadequacy of language in representing the reality of individual experience and emotion. Above all, Jenkins's treatment of his recurrent concerns is driven by intense ethical awareness. He wants to examine the moral inconsistencies and hypocrisies of human nature; his fiction forces us to see ourselves as we really are, and shocks us into recognising our moral weaknesses. Throughout his work, Jenkins toys with the idea of attainable moral perfection, that pure goodness can exist in a world of selfishness and greed. At the same time, his narratives stress the near impossibility of achieving such goodness through showing that humanity is by nature morally fallible and limited.

This thesis will focus on the central characters through whom Jenkins explores human fallibility and the ambiguous nature of goodness. The development of some characters is marked by a sense of moral inadequacy, intense self-interrogation, and the tendency to set impossibly high moral standards for themselves. These protagonists often realise that without accepting their own and other people's fallibility, they reject the reality of their own humanity. Accordingly, their paths towards self-knowledge and love of mankind depends on ultimate disillusionment and acceptance of their own and others'

imperfections. Alternatively, Jenkins's characters are eventually, and often through some tragic event, forced to acknowledge that their idealism has been severely misguided, or that their gestures of charity are in reality tainted by the desire to advance themselves socially and morally. In this way, Jenkins consistently emphasises the essentially flawed nature of humanity. Often, his novels suggest that real goodness is unattainable in a modern, capitalist world, since refusal to comply with the rules of a materially selfish society would result in the individual's social isolation. When moral perfection seems to have been achieved in Jenkins's fiction, it either appears to exist outside reality and beyond the limits of a socially conditioned world, as in the case of Calum in *The Cone-Gatherers*, or is received with suspicion and scepticism, as in the case of Gavin Hamilton in *A Would-Be Saint*. Accordingly, those characters in Jenkins's novels who seemingly represent goodness or spirituality are sometimes presented in highly ambiguous terms.

I have chosen to call those central characters of Jenkins's work, whose quests for morality and self-knowledge are central to this thesis, 'pilgrims of conscience'. Theirs is a moral pilgrimage because they usually reach a different understanding of themselves and of human moral ability through the course of their story. While my discussion will focus mainly on these characters' search for moral certainty and transcendence, I will also deal with other aspects of Jenkins's work that are central to his moral questioning, and which in most cases are related to the inner dilemmas of his protagonists. However, before explaining in some detail the structure of this thesis, and the methods by which its subject will be approached, I will briefly introduce Jenkins's life, character and views, and the influences that may have shaped his work, and comment on Jenkins's place in Scottish and European literary tradition and intellectual thought.

*

(John) Robin Jenkins was born on the 11th of September, 1912, in Flemington, a small mining village between Cambuslang and Hamilton in Lanarkshire.⁴ He spent his childhood in Lanarkshire and won a bursary for his secondary education at Hamilton Academy. In his teens, Jenkins went to a number of churches, including the Episcopal Church (where he pumped the organ for the organist), trying to find a 'spiritual home', but eventually decided that none of them suited his beliefs and became a professed atheist.⁵ After this, he studied English at Glasgow University, and although he describes this time as 'an enormous discouragement to me as a writer' and claims that it left him 'with a vast lack of respect for academic opinion',⁶ he finished an MA there in 1936. After this, he married and taught English in a primary school in Glasgow for four years. When World War II broke out, Jenkins had become a committed pacifist, and registered as a conscientious objector. He was exempted from military service and worked for the

Forestry Commission in Argyll between 1940 and 1946. After the war, Jenkins resumed teaching, this time in a Glasgow secondary school, situated in an East End working-class area. During this period, Jenkins first started writing seriously. In 1955 he moved to a post in Dunoon Grammar School; two years later he left Scotland and during the next decade taught in several countries (Afghanistan, Spain and Sabah, formerly North Borneo)⁷ before returning to Scotland for good in 1968. Two years after his return, he retired from teaching and devoted himself to writing. He has lived in Toward, just south of Dunoon, since 1968, although he has also lived and written for periods in Spain, California, and Canada.⁸ In 1999 he received an OBE for services to literature.

It is obvious that several aspects of Jenkins's life have strongly influenced his work; I will only point out a few of these here⁹ (some autobiographical elements of Jenkins's fiction will be dealt with where relevant in the following chapters). Jenkins hardly knew his father, who fought in World War I and died of rheumatic fever in 1919, shortly after returning home from the war. Jenkins's mother was left on her own to support a family of four children by working as a cook and housekeeper. This provides the background to *Happy for the Child* and *A Would-Be Saint*, where the father of each protagonist dies during the Great War, leaving the mother labouring as a charwoman to sustain her children. Furthermore, Jenkins grew up against the background of the 1920s Depression, and the General Strike of 1926 left a lasting impression on him, confirming 'both the injustice of the social system and the necessity for ordinary workers to come together in hard times, to face adversity and resist'.¹⁰ This considered, it is not surprising that much of Jenkins's fiction focuses on proletarian Scotland, charting the deprivation of characters living in urban poverty and squalor, and, especially when juxtaposed with the comfort and luxury of the bourgeoisie, emphasising the moral hypocrisy and injustice of capitalist ideology. Being a conscientious objector and working in forestry during the war has also influenced Jenkins's novels, and his teaching career gave him an exceptional understanding of children. Last but not least, Jenkins's years abroad provided inspiration for his novels that are set in foreign places.

Jenkins has been very reluctant to disclose personal information, and claims that his private life has little bearing on his fiction.¹¹ It is therefore interesting to find that Jenkins shows a more intimate side to himself through a literary form marginal to his achievement. After the death of his wife, Jenkins published a sequence of poems that deal with his loss, and describe the cheerfulness and optimism of his late wife, May.¹² These beautiful poems picture various episodes in Jenkins's life before and after his wife's death. Their sheer intensity of feeling reveals the depth of Jenkins's love, while some of his own personal beliefs are emphasised:

She is not here today, or any day.
 As if I was a child I am assured
 That she is waiting for me in heaven.
 Her body, like Christ's, was resurrected.
 But what I saw was dust blown in the wind.
 [...]

It is a matter of faith, they admit in the end:
 Believing what you want or need to believe.
 What they really mean is they do not know.
 Neither do I, but since the evidence
 Is all against it I cannot convince myself
 That May, restored and happy, waits
 In some divine dispensation where whins
 Lack thorns and there is no sorrow or pain
 Or loss or grief or disappointment.¹³

Although suggesting that Jenkins would like to believe in life after death, the poem underlines his distrust of what he calls 'organised ... and "churchy" religion',¹⁴ and echoes his atheistic stance. The contradiction between wanting to believe, on one hand, and the inability to be convinced, on the other, is evident here. This kind of paradox is a recurrent motif in Jenkins's fiction. Novels such as *The Missionaries* (1957), *Some Kind of Grace* (1960), and *Willie Hogg* (1993) are haunted throughout by the elusive possibility of spiritual affirmation, but this possibility is usually contravened through a subtly sceptical and ironic narrative voice.

Another poem, published later and, speculatively, also written after the death of Jenkins's wife, is even more self-revealing than the earlier poems. 'Cardwell Bay 1937',¹⁵ describes, in narrative and snapshot form, a moment in 1937 during the couple's courting days. At the same time, the poem juxtaposes the 'here and now' of the setting with intimations of their future stay in the formerly colonised East, and the more luxurious life-style they would enjoy. For gaining an understanding of Jenkins's personality and convictions, it is a telling poem, encapsulating what can only be gleaned through careful reading of his fiction. The poem projects an image of Jenkins as an angry young man who is intensely sceptical of human morality and the establishment. Through his description of his wife's energy and optimism, Jenkins implies that her love of life helped counter his own pessimism. When considering his fiction collectively, it is precisely this tension of pessimism and optimism that characterises Jenkins's portrayal of humanity. The poem is quoted here in its entirety:

'Cardwell Bay 1937'

She asked him once, Did he think
 She had made a good catch?
 Startled, and a little wary,

For her irony unlike his own
Was shy and elusive,
He replied: Yes, he did think so,
But he had made a better one.
Serious then, she asked:
Did he really mean it?

Here they are, the pair of them,
Before marriage. In the background
Cardwell Bay, in her native Greenock,
With the hills of Argyll beyond.
He is that young fellow slouching
Against the rail, with tousled hair
And quizzical eyes.
He has rejected God.
He will be married
By declaration, to avoid
Having a clergyman present.
He supports neither side in Spain.
All wars are to him barbarous.
He distrusts politicians of any hue.
He has a contempt for judges... [*sic*]
He knows humanity is capable
Of every imaginable cruelty.
He says he prefers animals.
He is poor. That suit is cheap,
Those shoes are down at heel.
He is prouder than Carnegie.

What does she see that causes that smile?
Hers is an eagerness that nothing
Will ever sour or quench.
She gives all the world, God,
Judges, politicians, soldiers, poets,
The benefit of many doubts.
She is poor. Umbrella,
Coat, shoes, and gloves
Are inexpensive. She is not bitter.
She is sure that one day
She will be able to afford better.
But there is also wonder in her smile.
Does she see herself dancing
In the ballroom of the embassy
In Kabul? Walking on the beach
In Acapulco? In Jaipur
Sleeping in a rajah's palace?
Wherever she is, in peace or war,
She will enjoy life
And inspire him to enjoy it too.

Yes, my love, I really meant it.

Jenkins's relationship with Scotland is an important feature of his work, since his fiction throughout displays a highly ambivalent perspective on this issue. On one hand, Jenkins's thematic approach emphasises the destructive effects of Calvinism on the Scottish character, and hints at a deep-set dissatisfaction with Scottish passivity and lack of confidence, especially in the political context. This is relevant to the 1979 Referendum in particular, as the Scots' failure to vote in favour of self-government almost made Jenkins leave Scotland forever.¹⁶ On the other hand, Jenkins's fiction also reveals the novelist's unchanging passion for his country and his strong awareness of his Scottish roots, even in the case of the many novels that are set abroad. Despite his despair at the Scots' lack of political confidence and the seeming absence of true national unity (Jenkins supports the SNP¹⁷), and despite his critical approach to Scotland's Calvinist mentality, Jenkins nevertheless argues that the people and culture of Scotland have a strength of subject matter to offer Scottish novelists.¹⁸ He maintains that, despite the fact that nothing much of great importance happens in Scotland, it is his pleasure and duty to write about his country and find inspiration in its ordinary people and ordinary circumstances.¹⁹ As early as 1955, Jenkins argued that despite Scotland's many faults, such as the 'superficial dreichness of the Scottish scene', and the Scots' 'darkness and violence of soul over trivial objects, alongside a proneness to dreary sentimental yearnings',²⁰ other, more positive, aspects of Scottish society, history and culture, can make these weaknesses a source of strength, as long as the Scottish novelist acknowledges them:

Admit the superficial greyness, therefore, and put it boldly in the picture: it can itself be a source of strength, as George Douglas Brown showed. To alleviate it there will be a virility that could blow like a West Wind through the becalmed pages of English fiction; a comic bravado; bursts of devastating self-criticism; humour sardonic, hard-hitting, irreverent, and courageous; and a resolute sadness that harks back to our old incomparable ballads.

[...] We have been a long time in acquiring our peculiarities: in spite of ourselves, they are profound, vigorous, and important; and it is the duty of the Scottish novelist to portray them.²¹

In this early essay, Jenkins uses Milton's 'In my own country, where I most desire',²² and argues that this should be every novelist's motto.²³ This quotation has influenced Jenkins throughout his writing career, as is emphasised in his use of it as a prescript to *Poor Angus* (2000). Clearly, Jenkins's relationship with Scotland, and his treatment of Scottish identity, most notably in novels like *The Sardana Dancers*, *A Very Scotch Affair*, and *Fergus Lamont*, provide sufficient scope for an extensive study in another context than here.²⁴

Although Jenkins is undeniably a Scottish writer, he has remained very much an outsider in the Scottish literary scene, as pointed out by the French critic Bernard Sellin.²⁵ The author has kept himself at a distance from Scotland's literary circles and has been reluctant to promote his work in the media and elsewhere. This self-chosen isolation is perhaps one of the reasons why Jenkins's work has not been more widely acclaimed. It may also contribute to the fact that it is problematic to place Jenkins's work within literary traditions or movements. Further, Jenkins's insistence that he does not belong to any literary tradition²⁶ manifests his strong opposition towards categorisation, and has perhaps reinforced the idiosyncratic nature of his literary approach. Nevertheless, some comparisons can be made between Jenkins's fiction and aspects of Scottish, British and European tradition, which will be briefly looked at here.

In the Scottish context, few critics have attempted to define Jenkins in terms of literary traditions in Scotland. Francis Hart has linked Jenkins to the tradition of the 'grotesque' in Scottish literature from Tobias Smollett to Muriel Spark, suggesting that Jenkins presents 'several states of life that call for the term grotesque', such as innocents who are monstrous (Calum in *The Cone-Gatherers* (1955) and Michael Eking of *The Holy Tree* (1969), for example).²⁷ On the other hand, Marshall Walker, in his abrupt, dismissive and unsubstantiated discussion of Jenkins's work as touching 'only intermittently on common experience', classifies Jenkins's early post-war fiction as realist.²⁸ Glenda Norquay further comments that Jenkins in the early years of his writing career was seen to belong to the movement of social realism that developed in Scotland from the 1950s onwards.²⁹ To counter this, however, Norquay argues that certain elements of Jenkins's fiction mean that the realism in Jenkins's novels becomes 'unreliable', with

apparently reassuring and omniscient narrators lapsing into confusion, ignorance and uncertainty, seemingly *central* characters suddenly moving out of focus, unexpected shifts of interpretation being thrust upon the reader, the real world rapidly becoming the domain of fable ...³⁰

Norquay suggests that it is this unreliable realism, combined with Jenkins's concern with the 'problematic nature of goodness' and his ambivalent attitude to the idea of Scotland and 'Scottishness', that make it difficult to place Jenkins in Scottish literary tradition.³¹

I would nevertheless argue that Jenkins's focus on urban working class life, and his critical stance towards the moral standards of class-division, revealed especially in his novels of the 1950s, establish his fiction as one of intense social analysis. Interestingly, Christopher Harvie, when discussing literary representations of urban Scottish life in the mid-twentieth century, fails to acknowledge the importance of Jenkins's 1950s fiction in this respect, dismissing it simply as burdened with Calvinism:

The problem in the 1950s had still been Calvinism: the near-impossibility of getting out from under the Great Determinist, who lay heavily on the work of Robin Jenkins, George Friel, J. D. Scott and James Kennaway. [...] It was only in the 1960s that the social inquiry predicated by [Lewis Grassie] Gibbon was resumed, into the life of the cities and the 'unknown' Scotland and the central belt, in the novels of Alan Sharp, Archie Hind, Gordon Williams and William MacIlvanney.³²

True, Calvinism and its legacy are significant elements of Jenkins's fiction, and early novels such as *So Gaily Sings the Lark* (1950), *Happy for the Child* (1953), and *The Thistle and the Grail* (1954) share a clear reference to the stultifying influence of Calvinist thought on Scottish character. But these novels, along with other 1950s novels such as *Guests of War* (1956) and *The Changeling* (1958), are also novels of social inquiry, presenting in no uncertain terms the grim realities of class-division in the slums and mining areas of Lowland Scotland. Harvie appears to be ignorant of the strong urban focus of Jenkins's early fiction, and his assertion that serious social inquiry in post-war Scottish fiction only started in the 1960s is therefore misguided. Indeed, Edward Gaitens's *Dance of the Apprentices* (1948) is an even earlier example of Scottish post-war fiction portraying the poverty and brutality of the Glasgow slums, and one could take issue with Harvie's remark on various other grounds. For instance, the fiction of George Friel, most notably *The Boy who Wanted Peace* (1964) and *Mr Alfred M. A.* (1972), focuses on the value of education against the horrors of slum life, and the influence of Calvinism is at best secondary to Friel's ruthless social investigation.

In light of the impact the Scottish Literary Renaissance had on Scottish cultural awareness, it is unlikely that Jenkins was altogether untouched by its ideology. In fact, considering that the Scottish Renaissance flourished during what was probably Jenkins's most formative period, it is surely tenable that its literary aims must have had some influence on his thinking, especially in terms of its focus on Scotland's marginal status within the United Kingdom.³³ At least, the Renaissance ideal of reinventing a national literature for Scotland that would be clearly distinguishable from English literature has some affinity to Jenkins's criticism of the marginal state of Scottish literature in the British context: 'our literature still gets ignored, it's shoved under a carpet, whereas ... the whole world knows about Irish literature. They don't know about the Scottish literature, and it's simply because we're smothered by the English'.³⁴

Even so, Jenkins has expressed deep scepticism towards the Scottish Renaissance and claims that it did not influence him:

I think it's rubbish to call it the Scottish Renaissance, and it certainly had no influence on me. It's a pompous title and if I'd ever been involved in writing then, such a name would have been an embarrassment to me.³⁵

Perhaps, for Jenkins, the concept of a Scottish Renaissance represents another categorisation that he is unwilling to accept. Further, the Renaissance movement had dwindled and mostly disappeared when Jenkins began writing in the 1940s. In fact, Jenkins has been classified by Douglas Gifford as belonging to those writers whose fiction was, in the 1950s and 1960s, 'sceptically and savagely repudiating organic and mythopoetic ideas of Scottish destiny', ideas which were central to the work of many Renaissance writers.³⁶ In light of Gifford's assertion, it is surprising to see Jenkins defined as a writer of the Scottish Renaissance but, in *The New Companion to Scottish Culture*, Maurice Lindsay remarks that, with the exception of George Blake, Jenkins is 'the only outstanding novelist of the Scottish Renaissance ... to write of urban dilemmas'.³⁷ By noting that Jenkins has never publicly associated himself with the Scottish Renaissance,³⁸ Lindsay highlights the shaky foundations of his own assertion, and his gross generalisation fails to recognise the extent to which Jenkins's eccentric and idiosyncratic approach defies classification and marks the elusiveness of his literary status.

Nevertheless, I would argue that there is apparent basis for Lindsay's assertion, however ambiguous. Jenkins's early fiction demonstrates well the dichotomous nature of his response to the Scottish Renaissance. His first novel, *So Gaily Sings the Lark*, has certain elements that echo the preoccupation of Scottish Renaissance writers, such as Neil Gunn, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, and Naomi Mitchison, with characters who, according to Gifford, are 'defined by all that has gone before them, so that they are perceived as knots in a web of history, tradition, [and] legend'.³⁹ David Sutherland's journey from city to country in search for a more simple, self-sufficient, 'natural' way of life, seems to accord with these ideas, suggesting that rural Scotland can offer a sense of unity and continuity to its people. The surface story emphasises David's personal satisfaction at his life in the country and his relief at having escaped the dirt and degradation of urban Lanarkshire. Edwin Muir's perception of the 'fallen' world of urban and industrialised Scotland in contrast to his Edenic Orkney would thus seem to mirror David's story. Moreover, certain aspects of the plot indicate that Jenkins was influenced by Neil Gunn in writing this novel.⁴⁰ *So Gaily Sings the Lark* is especially reminiscent of Gunn's *Wild Geese Overhead* (1939).⁴¹ In each novel, the protagonist sees a flock of birds flying overhead—geese in Gunn's novel, swans in Jenkins's—and this incident achieves an almost mythical significance in the context of the protagonist's escape to the countryside in search of fulfilment. In Gunn's novel, the experience of seeing wild geese overhead prompts Will to move to the country, where his life is transformed as he gradually finds spiritual fulfilment in the natural world. In Jenkins's novel, David toys with the idea of following the swans to

their inland loch among the hills, there to be reconciled with nature in an almost archetypal fashion, which evokes Renaissance ideas of regeneration. *So Gaily Sings the Lark* thus appears to echo Gunn's novel in illustrating a Renaissance ideal in which the protagonist is united with nature and made aware of a new continuity with his past.

However, Jenkins's presentation of the Kilcalvonell society of farmers, forestry workers, housewives, and clergymen, with its social distinctions, poverty, disintegration, and spiritual negligence, rejects Renaissance suggestions of a harmonious fusion of man with nature. In this context, Jenkins emphasises the significance of the words of David's miner friend, Jim Forsyth, who has told him that his escape into the countryside in search of a better life is nothing but 'an auld Scots dream' (*GSL* 9). Forsyth's perspective argues that urban Scotland represents the future, and that there is no way to reverse the process of industrialisation, even though its conditions may be difficult and unrewarding: 'Here's whaur we bide now, here's whaur we must thole it. You'll be back at the coal-face, Davie, wi' the black dust for your tan' (*GSL* 9). Jenkins's ultimate message is that there can be no real return to the 'old ways', undermining any belief in the kind of 'pre-historic Golden Age of a rural Scotland'⁴² that was established within Renaissance ideology. Further, the narrative presentation of David's thoughts on following the swans confirms how sceptical is Jenkins's outlook on Renaissance ideals. First presenting the idea in highly idealistic terms, thus suggesting a mythic significance to its realisation, the narrative then proceeds to subvert the notion, eventually dismissing it with an abrupt piece of reduction:

Any man or woman, at the level of street consciousness, if stopped and consulted, would consider and give advice ... But this notion of following swans into bare dark hills would be vigorously and without the least stammer of doubt put down as a nameless absurdity, not worth discussing outside a madhouse ... If he, humouring this folly in him, set off into the darkness to look for a lochan in the hills and pass the night counting the reflected stars, he certainly would not be visited by inspirations conferring on him then, and forever after, a wisdom, insight, and patience conspicuously grander than that of his fag-puffing or bargain-chasing neighbour. No, he would find his backside damp, his feet frozen, his belly empty, and his hopes as hungry as himself. After an hour, or even less, the swans would be birds, the lochan water, and himself a chattering fool. (*GSL* 31-32)

Despite borrowing elements from Gunn, then, Jenkins nevertheless reverses Gunn's philosophy through his use of reductive idiom.

While narrative deployment of the reductive idiom is seen as a peculiarly Scottish tendency, it is also important to view Jenkins's work in the wider context of British literature. Jenkins became a young man during the years when Modernism was at its height in British writing, advocated and practised by writers such as T. S. Eliot, James

Joyce, Hugh MacDiarmid, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf, whose innovative narrative technique and use of new images in poetry constituted a break from the nineteenth century 'realist' tradition. Modernism was essentially 'post-Darwinian' in its 'search to explain mankind's place in the modern world, where religion, social stability and ethics are all called into question'.⁴³ When Jenkins started writing seriously after World War II, however, the modernist 'sense of fragmentation both of individuality and of ... space and time'⁴⁴ had developed into 'a sense of absurdity, [and] of existential futility', derived to a great extent from the threat to human existence posed by the atomic bomb.⁴⁵ In many ways, Jenkins's fiction shares aspects of both periods in British writing. His concern with human alienation in modern society, and his questioning of modern religious, moral and social values, echoes the considerations of the modernist movement, and shares its sense of spiritual disillusionment. Within the frame of Jenkins's general concern with the ethics of war, the threat of nuclear arms and the problematic morality of nuclear deterrence are also central to his fiction, as seen in novels such as *A Toast to the Lord* (1972) and *Just Duffy* (1988).⁴⁶ Though not obviously so, his work in some ways (especially later novels like *Fergus Lamont* and *Poverty Castle*) breaks from tradition and challenges the realist model,⁴⁷ despite the fact that Jenkins regards himself as a realist, 'maybe too much so'.⁴⁸ Significantly, he holds that the shifts in narrative perspective that are such a prominent feature of his work reflect his belief that there is 'no absolute truth';⁴⁹ this, perhaps, influences Cairns Craig's recent assertion that Jenkins 'uses the techniques of traditional realism precisely to subvert the certainties ... which realism was designed to support'.⁵⁰ Thematically, Jenkins's writing is comparable to other twentieth century writers such as Graham Greene, whose fascination with Catholic guilt and salvation—in novels like *The Power and the Glory* (1940)—is comparable with Jenkins's preoccupation with the ambiguity of goodness and the possibility of redemption through sacrifice. As Isobel Murray suggests, there are certain affinities between the whisky priest in Greene's novel and Jenkins's various self-castigating pilgrims of conscience, such as Bell McShelvie in *Guests of War* who, like the priest, exercises 'charity towards other people's faults and great harshness towards her own'.⁵¹

Nevertheless, Jenkins's fiction is not easily categorised among the literary movements of the twentieth century, due mainly to the highly eclectic nature of his work. The wide-ranging intellectual reference of his fiction indicates that Jenkins is deeply in tune with contemporary and earlier intellectual thought, but it is difficult to pin down any one dominating creative influence on his writing. Aspects of his literary approach suggest a strong adherence to more traditional narrative methods, and his eagerness to follow the example of Jane Austen and George Eliot (two of his favourite authors) in focusing on the

story and the development of characters is very telling in this respect.⁵² Formally and technically, he is closer to writers like Austen, Sir Walter Scott, Thomas Hardy, and E. M. Forster than to Lawrence, Joyce or Woolf. His work is especially comparable to that of Hardy and Robert Louis Stevenson, both of whom are also among his favourite novelists.⁵³ Indeed, even though he insists that no writer has really influenced him,⁵⁴ he has elsewhere admitted that he was influenced by Stevenson at the beginning of his writing career⁵⁵ (some affinities with Stevenson's writing will be discussed in later chapters). Moreover, Hardy's pessimistic exploration of social morality in many ways anticipates Jenkins's own. There are clear similarities between the disturbing pessimism of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1896) and the bleak social vision of Jenkins's *The Changeling* (1958). Like Hardy, Jenkins is more interested in character than event.⁵⁶

In his essay on Jenkins's *A Very Scotch Affair*, Sellin draws some parallels between Jenkins's fiction and modern literature, pointing out that the 'sense of isolation, the absence of spiritual values, the degradation of the environment, the inadequacy of religious response' evident in Jenkins's work are common features of other modern writing.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Sellin argues, Jenkins's work differs in its presentation of positive values against the background of bleak disillusionment: 'love, honesty, courage, humility, personal commitment, compassion, flexibility, justice'.⁵⁸ At the same time, Sellin draws more specific comparisons between Jenkins's narrative positions and Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism.⁵⁹ Here, Sellin is referring especially to Sartre's argument that 'Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself'.⁶⁰ Indeed, Jenkins must have become aware of existentialism when, under the auspices of Sartre, it gained world-wide popularity in the 1940s. Jenkins may have been attracted to Sartre's existentialism because of its emphasis on atheism; a central aspect of Sartre's philosophy is that God does not exist and therefore man is 'condemned to be free'⁶¹ in a world where 'reality alone is reliable'.⁶² There are striking similarities between the approaches of Jenkins and Sartre. For example, the emphasis on human limitations in Jenkins's fiction, as well as the prominence of protagonists who seek to transcend these limitations through specific action, or who come to understand that accepting life within those limits is a necessary part of existence, seem to accord with Sartre's definition of the 'human universality of *condition*' as depending on limitations⁶³ (*italics his*): 'every human purpose presents itself as an attempt either to surpass these limitations, or to widen them, or else to deny or to accommodate oneself to them'.⁶⁴ David Roberts's description of Sartre's creative writing would seem to accord with that of Jenkins's fictional world:

[Sartre's] plays and short stories depict human beings trapped by social injustice, war, and the spiritual decay of civilization, as well as by their own

psychological compulsions—trapped, and yet inescapably responsible for the way in which they deal with the circumstances which confront them.⁶⁵

Jenkins's characters are likewise trapped, both by the circumstances of their environment and their own nature, and they are continually faced with moral choices which, when made, determine whether the character in question is weak or strong, honest or false, charitable or selfish, heroic or cowardly. In this sense, Jenkins's characters fit the model described by Sartre; they become simply what they make of themselves.

Despite these similarities, Jenkins's writing deviates from the existentialist ideal in several ways. One principle of existentialism is that people are not heroes or cowards through the influence of their heredity, environment, or other determining factors, psychic or organic, but are simply heroes or cowards because they have made themselves thus by their actions.⁶⁶ This is true of Jenkins's characters: they determine the value of their actions and thereby define their own character through the moral choices they make. But Jenkins's fiction always considers external factors that are possibly influential to the choices made by his characters. In Jenkins's novels, environment, heredity, psychology, and sexuality all play a significant role in the behavioural pattern of his characters and thus determine what kind of people they become. In *Love is a Fervent Fire*, it is her repressed and frustrated sexuality that causes Miss Carmichael's spite towards Hugh Carstares and Constance Kilgour. In *Dust on the Paw*, it is Abdul Wahab's cultural background that influences the shifts between guile and innocence that characterise his moral behaviour. Heredity is moreover linked with the question of innocence and sin in *A Love of Innocence*, where the narrative voice implicitly suggests that the Sneddon brothers, whose father brutally murdered their mother, may in some obscure way be tainted by their father's crime. In Jenkins's fiction, even if man makes himself a coward by his actions, there is always the possibility that part of his cowardice is caused by hereditary or environmental factors.

Sellin's comment that Jenkins's fiction reveals 'irrational elements' more conspicuously than existentialist writing⁶⁷ is further indicative of how Jenkins's fiction departs from Sartre's philosophy. Sartre's existentialism is based on the concept of a God-less world, where only man is responsible for his own life, and this life is not subject to external, 'unreal' influences such as providence or fate. Interestingly, even though Jenkins is a professed atheist, his fiction presents the possibility of divine intervention in highly ambiguous terms, unable neither to repudiate it nor affirm it. The possibility of external, divine control is a recurrent movement in his work, sometimes implying that this external influence is a mischievous God playing tricks on ignorant humanity. Since various examples of possible divine intervention in Jenkins's fiction are noted in relevant chapters,

it suffices to mention only one here to illustrate the point. This is the death of Sammy McShelvie in *Guests of War*, which, it is implied, represents divine retribution on Bell McShelvie for deserting her family and treating her neighbours with arrogance and spite. The death of Sammy and other ‘innocents’ in Jenkins’s fiction also introduces another dimension to the question of divine intervention, since these deaths show Jenkins playing with ideas of sacrifice and atonement which are clearly related to religious ideology, and which bring the motif of the scapegoat into prominence. Therefore Jenkins, regardless of his atheism, does not apply the existential principle of there being no God, no fate, no external intervention, to his own fictional world. In Glenda Norquay’s words, there seems to be ‘an acknowledgement of, but dissatisfaction with, the existentialist outlook’.⁶⁸

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The structure of this thesis reflects my definition of the three main periods of Jenkins’s writing. These can be roughly labelled as: his *early Scottish novels* (1950-1963); his *foreign fiction* (1960-1974); and his *later Scottish fiction* (1968-2001). The first and the last period overlap with the middle period in terms of publication dates—*A Love of Innocence*, *A Very Scotch Affair*, and *A Toast to the Lord* were all published during those years in which Jenkins’s literary output was mostly based on his foreign experience. Furthermore, he published a novel set abroad, *Leila*, in 1995, more than twenty years after the publication of the last foreign novel, *A Figure of Fun*. For this reason, and also because these two novels are strikingly similar in terms of plot and theme, I will discuss *Leila* briefly in the chapter on *A Figure of Fun* in Part III of the thesis.

The novels belonging to the first period are all set in Scotland, focused solidly on the familiar or ‘home’, even though many of them, most notably *The Cone-Gatherers* (1955), deal with issues of universal and timeless significance. Most of Jenkins’s early Scottish narratives are preoccupied with social division and human morality, while their more local reference questions the distinction between rural and urban values in Scottish society. In general, Jenkins’s early novels convey a bleak vision of Scottish character and culture, indicating perhaps that Jenkins’s travels furth of Scotland and the transference to foreign settings in his fiction signify dissatisfaction with Scotland as offering limited scope to his moral and social investigation.

The novels and short stories from the second period are based on Jenkins’s years abroad, and focus predominantly on Scottish characters within foreign settings (Borneo, Afghanistan, India, Spain), although there are exceptions such as *Dust on the Paw* (1961) and *The Holy Tree* (1969) where Scottish characters are either minor or non-existent within the plot. Jenkins frequently juxtaposes the exotic and the familiar in these stories, thus bringing the foreign setting closer to prospective Western readers as well as emphasising

the universality of human experience. The foreign narratives also carry an intense questioning of British imperialism within their treatment of expatriate life in a (post)colonial environment. This part of Jenkins's fiction has been largely neglected, and its comparative relevance to postcolonial literature and to other British treatments of the imperial theme would be material for a much more extensive discussion than this thesis can provide.

The later Scottish fiction focuses predominantly on Scottish settings. The novels of this period reveal a more detached, ironic stance towards Scottish issues than do the earlier Scottish novels, and are marked by a greater subtlety of approach as far as Jenkins's often almost surreal presentation of Scottish society and character is concerned. As with Jenkins's early novels, they tackle themes of social division, morality, cultural fragmentation, and Scottish identity, but some of them are experimental in terms of narrative technique and thematic approach, while generally conveying a more positive perspective on Scottish faults than is the case in Jenkins's early Scottish fiction.

My discussion of Jenkins's work will be thematic rather than theoretical throughout, except that my treatment of Jenkins's foreign fiction takes into consideration some aspects of postcolonial criticism. I will follow a broadly chronological outline, in each chapter dealing with either individual novels or grouping together narratives that are linked by thematic and/or narrative similarities, and which are from within the period being dealt with in the relative part of the thesis. I will, however, examine the novels of the first two periods in somewhat more detail than those of the later Scottish period. There are several reasons for this approach. Firstly, the majority of texts published within these two periods have suffered critical neglect, especially the novels and stories that are set abroad. While criticism can be found in a number of essays and articles on novels such as *The Thistle and the Grail*, *The Cone-Gatherers*, *Guests of War*, and *The Changeling*, there is very little written on other texts such as *So Gaily Sings the Lark*, *The Missionaries*, *A Love of Innocence*, *Some Kind of Grace*, *Dust on the Paw*, *The Sardana Dancers*, *The Holy Tree*, *The Expatriates*, and *A Figure of Fun*. By contrast, the majority of the later Scottish fiction has received considerable critical attention, especially novels like *A Very Scotch Affair*, *A Would-Be Saint*, *Fergus Lamont*, *The Awakening of George Darroch*, and *Just Duffy*. Secondly, although the so-called pilgrim of conscience is featured throughout Jenkins's fiction, the development of the pilgrim figure is most prominent in the earlier years of his writing. By focusing more closely on the early texts, I will establish the emergence and growth of different types of the pilgrim figure, as well as bring attention to other issues that are central to Jenkins's moral analysis and that prove pertinent to the entire range of his work.

Endnotes

- ¹ Jenkins still has at least two or three unpublished novels in his drawer. When I visited Jenkins in Toward in March 1997, he told me about his unpublished novels, then five or six. Since the interview, three of these have been published.
- ² Among the critics who have dealt with Jenkins's work in detail are Paul Binding, Cairns Craig, Douglas Gifford, Francis Russell Hart, Manfred Malzahn, Margery Palmer McCulloch, Isobel Murray, Glenda Norquay, and Bernard Sellin. For further details, see Bibliography.
- ³ For full details, see Bibliography.
- ⁴ I have based much of my summary of Jenkins's life and career on Bernard Sellin, 'Robin Jenkins: The Making of the Novelist', *Cencrastus* 24 (1986): 7-9. Sellin's article provides a detailed biography of Jenkins and demonstrates clearly those aspects of Jenkins's fiction that are partly autobiographical. Sellin's article is moreover the only essay on Jenkins which includes a comprehensive discussion of Jenkins's life.
- ⁵ Personal Interview 16.
- ⁶ Robin Jenkins, interview, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', by Glenda Norquay, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1985, 444.
- ⁷ For more specific details on Jenkins's years abroad, see Part III, chapter 1.
- ⁸ Robin Jenkins, 'Why I decided Scotland must be seen through fresh and truthful eyes', *Glasgow Herald* 12 October 1982: 11.
- ⁹ Again, Sellin's essay, 'The Making of the Novelist' provides a more thorough treatment of this question.
- ¹⁰ Sellin, 'The Making of the Novelist' 7.
- ¹¹ Despite this, Jenkins's words on several occasions suggest that his characters are partly based on himself. For instance, when I asked him if he could see himself in any of his characters, he replied: 'Well, I suppose—this is me being a wee bit ambitious—I suppose Gavin Hamilton in *A Would-Be Saint*. I would have liked to have been like him. But I don't know, he's a bit more ethereal than me, I'm pretty down-to-earth as a person. And there are bits of me in Fergus Lamont, I think' (from an unpublished part of Personal Interview, 21 March 1997). Jenkins has also commented that he does not put himself in his novels, 'except as a diffused personality, although I do use my experiences and my knowledge of locale' (Jenkins, interview with Norquay 444). It is also interesting to note in this context that when Jenkins read from his work at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, on 1st of March 2001, one of the audience asked him if he based his characters on himself. Jenkins did not deny this directly, but ambiguously insisted that his characters had far more interesting lives than his own.
- ¹² Robin Jenkins, 'Homemaker', 'Tavira', 'Waiting', 'Desolation', 'Next Morning', *Chapman* 71 (Winter 1992-93): 72-75.
- ¹³ Jenkins, 'Waiting' 73-74.
- ¹⁴ Personal Interview 16. Jenkins does not believe in the words of ministers that the dead have gone to a happier land: 'I think it's awfully naïve. It embarrasses you a wee bit. You want religion to be a grander thing than that'.
- ¹⁵ Robin Jenkins, 'Cardwell Bay 1937', *Fallen Angels: Paintings by Jack Vettriano*, ed. W. Gordon Smith (London: Pavilion, 1994) 92.
- ¹⁶ Jenkins, interview with Norquay 437.
- ¹⁷ Personal Interview 15.
- ¹⁸ See Jenkins, 'Novelist in Scotland', *Saltire Review* 5 (1955): 7-10; Jenkins, 'Why I decided' 11; Jenkins, Foreword, *Lunderston Tales*, by Jenkins (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996) ix-x; and Personal Interview 14.
- ¹⁹ Personal Interview 14-15.
- ²⁰ Jenkins, 'Novelist in Scotland' 8.
- ²¹ *ibid* 8.
- ²² The quote is from John Milton's 'Samson Agonistes', line 980. Samson, captive, blind and in the prison of Gaza, is visited by Dalila, his treacherous wife. She pleads for forgiveness and reconciliation. Rejected by Samson, she leaves saying that she will be famous among the Philistines for delivering Samson to them: 'But in my countrey where I most desire, / In Ecron, Gaza, Asdod, and in Gath / I shall be nam'd among the famoussest / Of Women, sung at solemn festivals, / Living and dead recorded ...' See Milton, 'Samson Agonistes', *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London: Oxford UP, 1958) ll. 980-984.
- ²³ Jenkins, 'Novelist in Scotland' 7.
- ²⁴ I have discussed some aspects of Scotland and Scottishness as presented in Jenkins's fiction in the following articles: 'Full Circle: The Function of Place in the Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *Terranglian Territories: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation*, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2000) 179-186; 'Chaos and Dissolution: Deconstruction and Scotland in the Later Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 41 (November 2000): 103-116; "'In my own country, where I most desire": Art and Identity in Robin Jenkins's *Poor Angus*' (forthcoming).

- ²⁵ Bernard Sellin, 'Commitment and Betrayal: Robin Jenkins' *A Very Scotch Affair*, *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996) 97-98.
- ²⁶ See Jenkins, interview with Norquay 436. Jenkins argues that the notion of literary traditions is purely a critical construct: '[Traditions are] imposed by the academics and literary critics. I'm never conscious of writing within a tradition. I don't think any writer is'.
- ²⁷ Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel* 284.
- ²⁸ Marshall Walker, *Scottish Literature Since 1707* (London: Longman, 1996) 319.
- ²⁹ Glenda Norquay, 'Against Compromise: The Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *Cencrastus* 24 (1986): 3.
- ³⁰ *ibid* 3.
- ³¹ *ibid* 3.
- ³² Christopher Harvie, *Scotland & Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707 to the Present*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge: 1998) 155-156.
- ³³ Further reference to the possible influence on Jenkins of Scottish Renaissance arguments regarding Scotland's status within Britain will be made in the context of his perspective on the British Empire in Part III, Chapter 1.
- ³⁴ Personal Interview 15.
- ³⁵ Jenkins, interview with Norquay 437.
- ³⁶ Douglas Gifford, 'Imagining Scotlands: The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction', *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996) 22.
- ³⁷ Maurice Lindsay, 'Jenkins', *The New Companion to Scottish Culture*, ed. David Daiches (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993) 168.
- ³⁸ *ibid* 168.
- ³⁹ Gifford, 'Return to Mythology' 19.
- ⁴⁰ In fact, Jenkins has said that he likes Gunn's writing—but with reservations: 'He's very good, a very sensitive writer; my favourite's *Morning Tide*. But his mysticism puts me off. I can't take it unless it's managed through the characters and the action; otherwise it makes for heaviness' (Jenkins, interview with Norquay 448).
- ⁴¹ Neil Gunn, *Wild Geese Overhead* (1939; Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991).
- ⁴² Gifford, 'Return to Mythology' 18.
- ⁴³ Ronald Carter and John McRae, *The Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain & Ireland* (London: Routledge, 1997) 350.
- ⁴⁴ *ibid* 350.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid* 449.
- ⁴⁶ I have dealt with Jenkins's treatment of the war theme in an essay presented at the ESSE conference in Helsinki in August 2000. The essay is entitled 'Ethics of War in the Fiction of Robin Jenkins' and is presently awaiting publication.
- ⁴⁷ An extensive and illuminating discussion of challenges to realism in Jenkins's fiction is found in Glenda Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins, and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985. Another very interesting analysis of Jenkins's relationship to traditional realism is found in Cairns Craig, 'Robin Jenkins—A Would-be Realist?', *Edinburgh Review* 106 (Spring 2001): 12-22.
- ⁴⁸ Personal Interview 18.
- ⁴⁹ Jenkins, interview with Norquay 443.
- ⁵⁰ Craig, 'A Would-be Realist?' 17.
- ⁵¹ Isobel Murray, introduction, *Guests of War*, by Robin Jenkins (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988) xv.
- ⁵² See Personal Interview 20.
- ⁵³ *ibid* 13-14. Jenkins also expresses his admiration for Evelyn Waugh.
- ⁵⁴ *ibid* 14. Jenkins says that he cannot think that anybody ever influenced him: 'There are so few Scottish writers who could do that, and I wouldn't allow an English writer to influence me'.
- ⁵⁵ Jenkins, interview with Norquay 436.
- ⁵⁶ According to Carter and McRae, Hardy 'focuses less on plot, more on the lyrical revelation of character' (Carter and McRae 313). Jenkins himself has commented that he is more interested in character than plot (Jenkins, interview with Norquay 439).
- ⁵⁷ Sellin, 'Commitment and Betrayal' 105.
- ⁵⁸ *ibid* 105.
- ⁵⁹ *ibid* 105.
- ⁶⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism & Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (1947; first trans. 1948; London: Methuen, 1989) 28.
- ⁶¹ *ibid* 34.
- ⁶² *ibid* 42.
- ⁶³ *ibid* 46.
- ⁶⁴ *ibid* 46.

⁶⁵ David E. Roberts, *Existentialism and Religious Belief* (New York: Oxford UP, 1957) 195.

⁶⁶ Sartre 42-43.

⁶⁷ Sellin, 'Commitment and Betrayal' 105.

⁶⁸ Glenda Norquay, 'Four Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s', *The History of Scottish Literature* vol. 4, ed. Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1989) 260.

Part II: The Early Scottish Novels

Chapter 1:

Ironies of Love: *So Gaily Sings the Lark* (1950) and *Love is a Fervent Fire* (1959)

So Gaily Sings the Lark and *Love is a Fervent Fire* are two out of many of Jenkins's novels that reflect the setting and experience of Jenkins's six years in the forestry service during World War II. Both novels are love stories centred on a male protagonist who moves from the city to the countryside of the West Highlands (Argyll) to work in forestry, and who falls in love with a local woman on arriving at his destination. Further, the two local women who are the objects of the protagonists' desires prove extremely complex characters whose behaviour and opinions are often far from pleasant; their very natures challenge the protagonists' goodness and influence their dealings with other people. Although on the surface *So Gaily Sings the Lark* and *Love is a Fervent Fire* seem to be simple love stories, neither of these are simple or straightforward, and Jenkins uses each relationship to explore various complexities and conflicts arising within his characters, highlighting their often paradoxical yet deeply human responses to each other and to themselves. Both are tales of complicated, frustrated, often cruel love, an emotion of physical and psychological power that transforms the protagonists' lives. These aspects of the novels set the framework for Jenkins's examination of central moral and social concerns.

There are other similarities between the two novels, and the most striking among these is the ironical significance of the novels' titles and their respective origins. The titles of the novels both derive from Scottish traditional poems and songs, which clearly reflect some aspects of the two stories. In many ways, moreover, each of the novels echoes the message or content of its relative song in an ironic way. The title of *So Gaily Sings the Lark* originates from a Uist Tramping Song,¹ beginning with the lines 'So gaily sings the lark, / And the sky's all awake / With the promise of the day, / For the road we gladly take...' (lines 1-4). The song evokes a cheerful encouragement to go 'tramping' away from the town and back to the 'hills of home' (line 13) in the countryside, and the relevance of this song is obvious when viewed in relation to David Sutherland's journey on foot from Lanarkshire to Argyll. In the context of narrative developments, however, Jenkins employs the song in an ironic way, wherein he questions the joy represented by the lark's song in relation to generalisations about escaping from the 'morally corrupt' town to the 'spiritually elevating' countryside. On the other hand, the title of *Love is a Fervent Fire* is borrowed from 'A Rondel of Love' by Alexander Scott (c1515-c1582), as

indicated by a prescript to the novel.² Scott's poem warns us of love's fervent fire which gives 'Short plesour, lang displesour' (line 9) and causes us eventual repentance. The poem sees love as something dangerous, something not compatible with wisdom—'There is no man, I say, that can / Both luvè and to be wise' (lines 17-18)—and advises us to 'Flee alwayis from the snare' of love that is 'ane pane and double trane / Of endless woe and care' (lines 19 and 21-22). Scott's poem is clearly relevant to the story of Hugh Carstares and his love for the haughty and bitter Constance Kilgour, whose complex and often cruel personality deeply affects Carstares and makes him doubtful about their relationship, despite his genuine love for her.

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It is clear from early in *So Gaily Sings the Lark* that Kirstie Hamilton looks down on David's poverty and humility, although she eventually falls in love with him and agrees to marry him. Through this aspect of the plot, Jenkins consistently reminds his readers that David and Kirstie are ill-suited, especially in terms of their material and social ambition, their expectations of life, and their attitudes to other people. Kirstie cannot understand why David came to Kilcalvonell, since she thinks that the town has much more to offer than the 'back of beyond' she lives in (*GSL* 28). She resents David's charity towards people like the McDougalls, claiming he should use the money to save up for their wedding, a fact which emphasises her materialistic selfishness in contrast to David's inherent goodness, charity, and self-denial. She regards David's humble contentment with living in peace at Craig, and his undemanding approach to life, with a 'passion of contempt' (*GSL* 119). While David would be happy to live a simple, even materially poor, life with her on her father's farm—which perhaps marks him as an embryonic form of Jenkins's later moral innocents and 'would-be saints'—she is socially ambitious and longs to leave Kilcalvonell for a more prosperous town life. Finally, her reaction to other people is often malicious and unpleasant, whereas David generally judges no one and seems wholeheartedly to appreciate people for what they are, with the exception of Isobel Kinross, whose character will be examined later in this chapter.

Kirstie's negative characteristics are clearly a challenge to David's good qualities, and this fact is important when considering Jenkins's treatment of moral issues. Thus Jenkins portrays Kirstie's obsessive concern with money as something likely to affect and diminish David's goodness. Consequently, despite Jenkins's often sympathetic and deeply moving approach to David and Kirstie's relationship, he nevertheless makes it clear that love between two people can compromise their moral behaviour and thereby prove destructive to character. David himself is aware that Kirstie's materialism will in the long run affect his own personality: 'she had revealed how serious was her mercenariness, ...

[and] his own inevitable degeneration was clear to him' (*GSL* 231)—his goodness will eventually suffer for his love of her. The irony of David's love for Kirstie is therefore revealed in her being a possible threat to his good qualities.

The Reverend Eric Kinross plays an important part in the love story of David and Kirstie. His proposal of marriage, after being given a respectable church and congregation in Glasgow, provides Kirstie with the chance she has been waiting for to escape from the countryside into an urban life of material well-being and comfort. Through Kinross's perspective, Kirstie's mercenary motivations are emphasised; although Kirstie does not love him, the minister is fairly sure that his social status will buy her consent:

It would be a gradual performance alluring her. Contempt would be at first in her shining eyes; it would slowly give way to envy, and calculation would unite with that envy to create an acceptance that would have in it, visible enough, all the ingredients, contempt and calculation and envy. (*GSL* 244)

Kirstie's break with David confirms this, and her move from David to Kinross arguably implies a rejection of rural values and a conscious decision to opt for an urban and materially secure existence. However, the puzzling, enigmatic end of the story works partly against this interpretation, since Kirstie's final decision is kept hidden from us and, perhaps, from David also.

So Gaily Sings the Lark is the earliest example of Jenkins's tendency to keep his readership in suspense at the end of his novels by suggesting possible alternative resolutions to the plot. The conclusion of this first novel is highly ambiguous, to say the least. Despite Kinross's proposal and Kirstie's break with David, neither David nor the reader knows which man she is going to choose at the end of the story. However, Alexander Reid claims that *So Gaily Sings the Lark* 'has a happy ending', since Kirstie 'in the end decides for Charity (David) against her other suitor'.³ Francis Hart supports this argument and maintains that this is the reason why 'the miracle lasts',⁴ while Winifride Logan fails to question such simplistic conjectures despite confirming that Jenkins likes to keep his stories open-ended.⁵ Yet there is no tangible proof that Kirstie is *not* going to marry Kinross instead of David, and it is indeed surprising that none of these writers notice this fact. In fact, Kirstie expresses her wish that David would curse her for what she has done by showing that she will put her social ambition in front of their love, and although she admits that to 'tell Kinross to go to hell' is a temptation (*GSL* 272), nothing indicates that this is what she is going to do. As the novel reaches its conclusion, the reader feels confused about her final decision, and so does David:

'This answer you've to give him to-morrow night in the church, have you made up your mind yet what it's to be?'

‘Yes,’ she cried running down the ride. ‘Yes, I have.’ She turned where, in the gloaming, he could not make her out distinctly; but her voice, when she called, was as clear as that beautiful light still in the western sky. ‘Before I met you this evening, Davie, do you know what I’d done? I had taken a cluster of rowanberries and pinned it on my coat. It’s still here. The tree wasn’t growing over the pool in the Kilcalvonell river, Davie, but near enough.’

He could think of nothing to say except ‘Good-night, Kirstie,’ which he shouted several times even after he could no longer see her. ‘Good-night,’ she called back, and it seemed to him she was weeping the words, *but whether in gladness or love or sorrow or perplexity he could not say.* (GSL 273, italics mine)

It is surely untenable to conclude, as Reid, Hart, and Logan have done, that *So Gaily Sings the Lark* has a ‘happy ending’. Significantly, it is not relevant here *what* the characters say, but *how* they say it. In Kirstie’s case, the *possible* emotions involved in her farewell imply different things. Although the image of the rowanberries may come across as positive and suggestive of an optimistic ending, other things, especially the last sentence of the book, work against this kind of reading, so that the rowanberries might not have any fixed positive meaning in this case. Kirstie’s reference to the rowan tree refers to her first serious conversation with David, during which she tells him about her dreams of a suburban house where she would have a birch and a rowan tree in her back garden. David answers that on looking out of the window at the ‘cluster of crimson berries’ she would not see a rowan in a suburban garden but a rowan ‘on a rock overhanging a pool in the Kilcalvonell river’ (GSL 119). This means that the rowanberries have a specific significance to David’s and Kirstie’s relationship. However, it is also possible that Kirstie has taken the cluster of rowanberries to strengthen her decision to opt for Kinross, as they would function as a symbol of her past life in the country, which she could take with her to the city. Thus the rowan tree in her back garden would, in symbolic terms, become the tree of Kilcalvonell that David initially mentions. Jenkins therefore maintains a clear ambivalence here, so that it is by no means definite what is the real significance of the rowanberries.⁶ Ultimately, the reader is unsure about whom Kirstie has chosen to marry, and thereby left doubting which social or symbolic road Kirstie has taken.⁷

The theme of religion is highly significant to Jenkins’s exploration of morality in *So Gaily Sings the Lark*. The role of the Reverend Kinross is important in this respect, while also being a focus for the novelist’s questioning of Scotland’s religious worth. Jenkins’s presentation of David’s first meeting with the minister already presents Kinross as a problematic person: ‘There was humility on the fat face, but in the form of a sneer. It was not simple to say who or what was being mocked, whether David himself, or the minister’s own bitterly uncertain faith’ (GSL 15). As the story develops, the various commentary on the minister further establishes an ambiguity in relation to the reading of

his character. David's feeling of unease increases as he spends more time with Kinross, and the minister's description of the people of Kilcalvonell reveals his unpleasant character. He calls them 'beasts ... with a farming instinct in their hands ... [who] copulate like beasts, are happy like beasts, sorrow like beasts, and like beasts have no thought of religion or of their own certain damnation' (*GSL* 17). And, yet, Kinross prefers his parishioners' 'easy-going heathen ways' to the strict religiosity in the far north of Scotland (*GSL* 17-18). Kinross is a character who, even though he has enough charity to offer David his help, is nevertheless a very complicated personality, and generally seems an unpleasant, impatient man, who despises his parishioners. In his portrayal is the suggestion that Scotland's spiritual leaders are an integral part of Scotland's decline.

In an important chapter, entitled 'Kinross on Duty', we are given direct access to the minister's thoughts, and offered various comments on Calvinist issues such as sin, forgiveness, faith, and grace. The minister's thoughts about Kirstie reveal a great deal about his character and the complexity of his religious and moral outlook. Witnessing her having sex with Lindsay the forestry worker has filled him with disgust and resentment, making his love for her seem to him filthy and tormented. After many demented prayers to God to 'allow him to believe her chaste' (*GSL* 162), he has had to acknowledge that his attempts 'to accept her as not virginal ... with a Christian comprehension' have always failed:

Another man, perhaps more than one, had known her carnally. He had in detail considered what that meant. The sweat had broken out on his brow, but he still had tried to wear a Christlike smile. After all, in spite of the groping fingers, the eager sniggers, and the frog-like spraches, those were mere bodily contacts, with hardly more significance than the touching of hands. The act of sex was momentary, whereas the union of souls was eternal. Forgiveness had seemed easy, and indeed irrelevant. Against the vast compassion of Christ such sins were surely venial, mere specks like the gulls in the clear morning sky. And sometimes for an hour, or for five minutes, while the example of that compassion stretched his mind beyond its normal limits, he had been able to pity Kirstie, and forgive her, and love her with a cleansed love. But that inspiration had always failed, and he was left reviling her and loving her, blaming Christ and cursing himself, and not knowing what to do. (*GSL* 162)

Kinross's religious ideology makes him look on the act of sex as a sin, as something which should only exist between man and wife, and preferably with conception in mind, rejecting any idea that sex is natural to humanity, and enjoyable. Jenkins's obviously ironic approach to Kinross's dilemma emphasises how wrong his attitude is, yet insists on the seriousness of his predicament, thus demanding respect for Kinross and his complicated character while criticising his dubious righteousness.

Other aspects of this chapter are important to our understanding of Kinross's ideology. While preaching, the minister sometimes thinks of himself and his congregation in morbid terms:

... often Kinross in the midst of dreich sermonising would watch [the road outside the church]... Seeing the rabbits [playing there], he would try to picture his life had he been a trapper instead of a minister. He would hear the squeals and see the panting terror of the snared creatures; and in his mind the congregation would take on rabbit faces, and he would see clearly the snares of selfishness in which every one of them was captured. (*GSL* 166)

Jenkins is deeply sceptical towards the religious establishment,⁸ and here he seems especially critical of people like Kinross who place themselves in a God-like position, and sneer inwardly at the people whose welfare they pretend to care for. Kinross's inadequacy is further demonstrated in his talk to the conscience-torn forestry ganger Donald Grant. After belittling the seriousness of Grant's predicament, he goes on to tell him that a 'delicate conscience is a luxury few men can afford', arguing that it is not possible to follow Christ's example since He was, after all, divine and 'had no responsibilities' (*GSL* 171). Kinross's words work in two ways here. First, they confirm Kinross's role as a self-made parody of a Christian who has no real or genuine belief in God and spirituality. Second, Kinross's comment about Christ's responsibilities reveals a typical Jenkins challenge to religion and morality. Thus, what Jenkins is implying is that no one can really imitate Christ, because Christ's holiness and goodness is above ordinary human experience. Grant simply cannot afford to follow Christ's example in his efforts to be good, since he has responsibilities to his family. On the other hand, Christ had no real family (i.e. wife, children or other such dependants) and could therefore afford his goodness.

Three other characters are significant to the novel's perspective on religion and providence. Firstly, Duncan Hamilton is an avowed atheist who nevertheless is described as blaming God for his wife's untimely and highly coincidental death when she was struck by lightning. After the grotesque description of Hamilton's legs being 'bandy and bent, as if either they were very painful or their owner in senility had wet himself', we find that Hamilton himself looks 'white-bearded, proud, and bitterly intelligent' (*GSL* 138). Ironically, therefore, Hamilton seems rather God-like in appearance. Seen through David's eyes, we are told that Hamilton has 'a glory of his own' (*GSL* 138). Indeed, Hamilton's story turns out to be the most peculiar sub-plot within the novel, when after expressing his view that everything, even God, is rotten under the surface, he dies in the most extraordinary circumstances. Walking up a hill in search of a fox's lair, the old man is hit and killed by boulders that break off and fall from the face of the cliff above him. His

death is considered by many as a manifestation of God's power to avenge Himself on those who go too far in criticising Him, the accident being referred to as 'the vengeance on Duncan Hamilton' (*GSL* 186), and even Kirstie herself suggests that her father died because he was constantly blaming God (*GSL* 194). Thus, by juxtaposing the reaction of other characters to Hamilton's death with the narrative's ironic approach to it, Jenkins conveys his own scepticism concerning God and religion. However, while Jenkins does not want us to take too seriously the suggestions of divine vengeance that are presented through the characters in the novel, the example of Duncan Hamilton does not fully deny the possibility of some kind of heavenly power that can intervene in people's lives. This is also reflected in *Love is a Fervent Fire*, where the Conservator (Carstares's superior) reflects on the 'naïve tampering with the balances of providence' (*LFF* 8) and wonders whether, given Carstares's injury from the war, it would be wise to send him to Kinlochgarvie, where a 'stumble over a drain on the hillside could easily be arranged by those inimical forces, if provoked' (*LFF* 9). This paradoxical and ambivalent approach to the question of providence is found in other novels by Jenkins, for instance in *Guests of War* and *The Missionaries*.

In *So Gaily Sings the Lark*, Donald Grant is a conscience-torn man whose concern with moral rightness is later echoed in the more developed character of Gavin Hamilton in *A Would-Be Saint*. Prompted by his Christian awareness to give up his job as ganger, Grant is one of those characters in Jenkins's fiction who sacrifice their individual interests in the name of Christian principle. Grant is, for a while, believed by some to be a 'genuine' Christian, but he soon seems to prove otherwise by going, 'crawling some said', to the laird 'to wheedle out of him a not very good job as handyman on the home farm' (*GSL* 253). The reason why everybody is pleased at this is 'partly because he, who had appeared to be walking in the clouds with Christ, had had to do a belly-flop in the dust at the laird's feet and so had regained his humanity' (*GSL* 253). Obviously, the general opinion in the area is that Grant's asking the laird for a job means that he is no better than themselves. The uneasiness felt by people at Grant's former sacrifice must therefore spring from their insecurity as to their own spiritual worth. Significantly, the reaction in this novel to a 'would-be-saint' is more or less the same as that pictured later in the reaction of others to the character of Gavin Hamilton. Not knowing how to react to goodness, and not knowing either whether goodness is the *real* motive behind the character's behaviour, other people in both narratives welcome any indication that these persons might after all share their common fallibility.

Finally, Isobel Kinross, the minister's sister, is important in terms of Jenkins's treatment of religion and morality in his first novel. Isobel's religiosity and the dubious

presentation of its genuineness are central to the novel and constitute one of the main reasons why she is disliked by many people in Kilcalvonell. Isobel's initial rejection of David (before seeing him) as a 'dirty, lazy, thieving, and flea-ridden' tramp (*GSL* 24) humiliates him and is one of the reasons for his continued dislike for her, despite her later apology. Her many attempts to become his friend merely increase his resentment. Similarly, Kirstie despises Isobel and claims that Isobel's attempts to become friends with David really arise from her desire to make a religious person out of him. According to her, Isobel is trusted by few in the area, and seen by most as hiding her 'real' self behind her religion:

'She pretends to be as innocent as a lamb still with its mother's blood on its wool, but she's really more like a fox. She's got lumps on her knees kneeling down to pray, but it's common talk that whenever any of her brother's minister friends comes to stay with them for a holiday, she gives him no peace but follows him about, blethering about religion, until his collar's soft with the sweat pouring down his neck. Maybe she doesn't know herself what she's really after, but he does.' (*GSL* 116)

Through Kirstie's perspective, Isobel is clearly presented as a fanatical, sexually starved and unpleasant woman. In light of this, Isobel seems similar to the long line of sexually and psychologically tormented spinsters found in many of Jenkins' later novels, and two of whom already appear in *Love is a Fervent Fire*. However, her young age and fervent belief in God (which rarely applies to Jenkins's spinsters) are more reminiscent of the fanatically assured but ambivalent Agnes Tolmie in the later *A Toast to the Lord*.

David himself initially dismisses Isobel as 'one of the many millions of theoretical Christians, who worshipped respectability and thought it the straight and narrow path to heaven, congratulating themselves on finding it smooth and thornless' (*GSL* 35). But the interpretation of Isobel's character given to us through David is constantly undermined by the reader's reflections on what her real motives are and in the recognition that David's opinion of her is negatively influenced by their first meeting. Further, Isobel's attempts to gain David's forgiveness and friendship gradually encourage a positive appreciation of her character. Her concern with the McDougalls' welfare and her readiness to take care of their daughter, should anything happen to Archie, also suggest that she is a good person. Morag McDougall seems to think well of her, which is important since Morag is presented as one of those down-to-earth, enduring, unselfish working class women who are considered a source of strength and wisdom in many of Jenkins's novels. It is mostly through David and Kirstie that Isobel is given a negative meaning, and she somehow seems to bring out the worst in both of them. Other people are suspicious of her and see her as different, but this need not signify that she is an unpleasant person.

Isobel is one of Jenkins' many characters who are subject to conflicting opinions, gossip, and malice. It is because of Isobel's status as 'outsider' in her community that people distrust her. In this sense we can compare her to other characters in Jenkins's novels who are set apart by their moral awareness, often ambiguous in quality, and Isobel is also in many ways comparable to Constance Kilgour in *Love is a Fervent Fire*. Both women are proud and unwilling to compromise their own integrity in gaining the community's approval. In Isobel's case, her religious beliefs further contribute to her status as an outsider, since other people do not know how to react to her (apparent) holiness. Because she is religious, Isobel has set herself apart, and she is aware of this, as revealed when she speaks to David at Coole:

'But it makes no difference to me what people think ... or what you think. I am not answerable to you, or to any living being. I am answerable to God only. [...] I know very well people sneer at me behind my back because I am not ashamed to say I believe in God. [...] I shall go my own way ... even if it is lonely.' (GSL 143)

Isobel seems one of few who still retain their faith in a world where old values and ideologies have disintegrated, or, in Jenkins own words, where the 'way of life which had given ... [the ballads and traditional songs their] characteristic nobility and pureness of passion was irrecoverably gone, and was succeeded by *an existence cheap and confused*' (GSL 114, italics mine). And, arguably, Isobel is, like Donald Grant, related to the category of 'would-be-saints' in Jenkins's work. Her honesty, faith and personal worth are constantly questioned through other characters.

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Love is a Fervent Fire, labelled as 'that strange anguished novel' by Alastair Thompson,⁹ explores the complex relationship of Hugh Carstares and Constance Kilgour, and also the responses of various other characters to this relationship. As in the previous novel, the protagonist moves from urban to rural, from Edinburgh to Kinlochgarvie in Argyll, but this time on a commission to work as the new District Officer in the forestry service. Carstares, a former veteran badly wounded in the leg in Burma, has lost his wife and is bitterly cynical about life. Carstares is notorious for his excessive drinking habits, and his arrival in Kinlochgarvie is marked by a number of episodes. Firstly, his immediate obsession with Miss Kilgour causes a misunderstanding among the locals that he is the father of her illegitimate daughter returned to make amends and marry her at last. Secondly, on his first night in Kinlochgarvie, Carstares makes a drunken fool of himself at the Kilgours' house by piteous supplication to Constance. Her rejection then prompts him to go to bed with the hotel maid, Nancy, thereby antagonising the son of a local farmer who sees Nancy as his sweetheart. Thus the protagonist's move from town to countryside

sets off a chain of events, which will in many ways deeply affect the community of Kinlochgarvie, Constance Kilgour, and himself. In this sense, therefore, Jenkins uses the move from urban to rural to initiate a process during which it becomes easier to define his characters, their psychological complications, their hopes, despairs and motivations. The community of Kinlochgarvie is, so to speak, disrupted by Carstares's arrival there, both in a positive and negative sense. Apart from Constance Kilgour, characters like Muriel Kim the hotel manageress, Helen Carmichael the schoolmistress, and Ronald Kilgour, Constance's brother, are confronted with aspects of themselves hitherto unacknowledged by themselves and unknown by others.

The motivations behind Hugh Carstares's love for Constance Kilgour of Garvie House are less than straightforward. His anger at the foresters' gestures of 'mock subservience' (*LFF* 24) as Miss Kilgour passes them on the road seems sprung from an absurd desire to protect a woman he has never even spoken to. However, Carstares's almost immediate obsession with Constance originates in his feelings of grief for his dead wife, and his need for atonement for the war whose horrors were magnified in his wife's death while he was abroad. Moreover, he sees in Constance's daughter Alison 'the means of resolving his grief at last' (*LFF* 46). It is as if Constance is for Carstares a substitute for his dead wife, providing him with an opportunity to set things right:

... it seemed more and more to Carstares that by wishing to befriend Constance Kilgour and her child, he was not in any way betraying Marion, or revealing as superficial and transitory his love for her. On the contrary, those two, and he himself now, lay under Marion's protection. She it was who had made him feel compassionate towards Constance walking alone in the rain ... Marion had been as fair as Constance was dark, simple and hopeful where the other woman was complex and stoical; yet in a strange way they were so much alike that as he made to recollect the one it would be the other who came into his mind. It was almost as if Constance was Marion transformed and still imprisoned by death; it would be his duty and delight to set her free. (*LFF* 46)

Carstares's feelings for Constance are a continuation of a complex and difficult past which he feels he can resolve through his relationship with her and her daughter.

Constance's reasons for starting a relationship with Carstares—which involves getting engaged to him on the second day of their acquaintance—are even more deeply psychological, and differ from Carstares's desire to release her from her bitterly stoic resentment. She sees Carstares as her chance of revenge for the bitterness and humiliation she has had to suffer after having an illegitimate child by her former lover Francis Weir, an airman who died in the war. While Carstares sees her as substituting Marion, she sees him as a replacement for her dead lover, but in her case this is a negative thing because of her mixed feelings of love, hatred and bitterness towards both Francis Weir, her daughter, and

what they represent, which is ‘the humiliation, not only of love rejected, but of humility enforced’ (*LFF* 95). Thus Constance admits to herself that she has stayed at Garvie House, not only out of ‘bitter loyalty’ to what used to be a splendid family estate, now dilapidated and inhabited by the impoverished remnants of a once great family, but also because ‘she was waiting, but for what or whom she could not tell’ (*LFF* 95). To her it is almost as if Carstares ‘was impersonating Francis’, while he also represents ‘the trees which she had grown so obsessively to hate and fear, and wish to destroy’ (*LFF* 95). Constance’s aversion to trees is a significant aspect of her character, since this already establishes a contrast between her and Carstares, who likes trees and works in the forestry service.

As in the case of David and Kirstie in *So Gaily Sings the Lark*, therefore, it is made clear that Carstares and Constance are not well suited and that they enter the relationship with altogether different prospects in mind. As the story progresses, it is made clear through the narrative voice and through other characters that Carstares’s infatuation with Constance may indeed prove destructive for him, and that his fiancée’s unkind and resentful attitude to people such as Rab McKerrol is likely to prove a challenge to and even diminish Carstares’s essentially kind personality. Carstares recognises this danger: ‘What he did not want, he thought, what he must at all costs avoid, was to fall in love with her, and yet hate her sometimes, distrust her, and despise himself. Love ought to bring reassurance, whatever else’ (*LFF* 141). The justification of his fears is emphasised when he refrains from asking Constance to see the dying Margaret Strone, simply because he anticipates—rightly, Jenkins suggests—that she will reject the sick woman’s offer of friendship. Consequently, Constance, in her uncompromising pride and cruelty, eventually forces Carstares to go against his conscience in his dismissal of Rab McKerrol from the forestry service, despite Mrs McKerrol’s apology to Constance on her husband’s behalf. By juxtaposing Jean McKerrol’s graceful simplicity and robust kindness with Constance’s aloof contempt, Jenkins makes clear who is in the wrong here. The relationship of Carstares and Constance and the threat posed by Constance’s personality to Carstares’s qualities is therefore highly significant in terms of Jenkins’s handling of moral concepts, and challenges to goodness, in this novel.

There are various hints throughout the narrative which relate to the more disturbing aspect of the central love story. Carstares’s own feeling early in his relationship with Constance clearly establishes this: ‘an impression of Miss Kilgour remained in him, as deep as his bones, and as cold as the snow on the hills’ (*LFF* 110). Going to Garvie House for the second time, he feels he should ‘go very warily, like a stag with a stalker on the hill’ (*LFF* 136). Jenkins’s use of images and symbolism is therefore obviously aimed at alerting the reader to the fact that Carstares is hardly secure in his relationship with

Constance. Further, the arbitrary and disturbing images that flash through Carstares's mind at moments in the story when he is full of tenderness and love for Constance carry great symbolic significance, as when his decision to propose marriage is followed by a memory from the war:

Unaccountably then, as he stood smiling across the car at her, a memory of the jungle occurred to him. ... there in the welcoming street he saw again the body of Sergeant Scourie, who had been a member of his platoon. Scourie had been sent ahead to scout. He hadn't returned, and a day later they had found his body dismembered with almost facetious obscenity. (*LFF* 147)

Images of merciless cruelty and gruesome death are here juxtaposed with Carstares's love for Constance, and this adds a feeling of foreboding to the story. A later juxtaposition of a slightly different kind highlights this element of foreboding. Carstares is walking in the woods, overwhelmed by its loveliness and the bountifulness of life within it:

... [he saw] the many catkins, with the male dangling as though in submission and the female upright in green arrogance. He closed his eyes and felt the sun warm on his face, remembering his own submission to Constance and wondering if his life with her would grow to be as beautiful as this birch in full leaf. He remembered, too, the great Burmese scorpions of which the female after consummation had torn the male to pieces. (*LFF* 182)

Constance may well be the female catkin, upright in arrogance but essentially harmless; however, the image of the female scorpion implies that her power over Carstares may prove much more dangerous than this. There is a feeling of underlying menace within Jenkins's portrayal of this love affair; sexuality carries almost Freudian, archetypal overtones of danger and threat while also inspiring happiness, optimism, and anticipation. Through Carstares's perspective, therefore, and through narrative devices such as symbolism and juxtapositions of apparently unrelated images, Jenkins reveals the complexities and paradoxes inherent in Carstares's relationship with Constance.

On the other hand, in presenting the love story from a different angle, Jenkins is carefully meticulous in his depiction of Constance herself and the psychology behind her reactions to Carstares. This bitterly proud woman whose 'aristocratic disregard' and 'renunciation' (*LFF* 22) make her a very unpopular figure in Kinlochgarvie, emerges as a deeply complex and unpredictable character, and her apparent strength, 'witch-like in its source' (*LFF* 83), has more cracks in it than appears at first. Through her brother we learn of her vengeful nature, and that her outward calm 'contained her terrible frustration':

She would not moan or whimper or even cry out in bitterness. She would lie like a nun on a bed of penitence in a solitary cell; only it would be hope of revenge which would keep her quiet, not the nun's promises of glory. (*LFF* 87)

Constance acknowledges her desire for revenge. From within her cold mind, 'that icy chamber where love, and hope, and gladness, were frozen into contorted shapes of mockery' (*LFF* 147), she realises that marrying Carstares 'might be like setting a match to a tuft of grass at the edge of the forest: a revenge impossible to control' (*LFF* 149). Yes, her acquaintance with Carstares sets off a chain of emotions she can hardly control, but differently from what she at first anticipates. Her reactions to Carstares swing between two extremes. When he buys her an extravagantly expensive engagement ring, she finds herself 'smiling up at him in an almost defenceless gratitude' (*LFF* 154), while later she hates him 'with a force like a blow in her stomach' (*LFF* 159). Thus she feels 'in the one fierce spasm of emotion the need to hurt Carstares and to love him' (*LFF* 171), and even when she seduces him on the night of their engagement with the intention of securing him, his money, and her own ultimate revenge upon him, 'some genuine love for him seemed strangely necessary' to her (*LFF* 173). Within her questioning of her own reactions, therefore, there is the possibility that Constance may love Carstares, but her love is obviously thwarted by her past suffering and the humiliation for which she feels she has to seek revenge. Thus she feels, as Carstares embraces her, that there is 'within her a frenzied reluctant love with, at its quiet centre, hatred and revulsion' (*LFF* 164).

As the story progresses, it is this 'reluctant love' that breaks down Constance's defences. However, her love for Carstares is clearly poisoned by pride and bitterness. Accordingly, her treacherous phone-call to the vengeful McKews to inform them of Carstares's solitary stay in the forestry watchtower is motivated by her inability to admit her love to him and herself. Jenkins makes clear this contradiction of love: 'Love when it did not wish to confess itself could be more resourceful in its malice than hate' (*LFF* 233). Regretting her treachery, Constance's love for Carstares brings her face to face with her own faults:

Ronald [her brother] was right in saying she was doomed: having fed on hate so long, she was now irremediably poisoned. To be pleasant to McLeish [a forestry worker] ought to have been easy; she had found it impossible. Though she was now climbing up through the dark forest to confess to Hugh that she had so shamefully betrayed him, her pride was far from defeated; without her permission, indeed against her will, it remained cunning, ferocious, and resourceful in seeking to regain its position, no matter what she might find at the tower. It would sacrifice Hugh, Alison, Ronald, and her hope of future happiness, rather than surrender. Yet surely it was not invincible: her love for Hugh could, with luck, overcome it. (*LFF* 252)

Despite this self-recognition, however, the narrative sustains an air of ambivalence almost to the very end of the novel, as seen through Constance's confused thoughts on the prospect of reconciliation with Carstares:

To be rejected would be to suffer for the rest of her life, but suffering, she knew, was endurable; whereas to be forgiven, and loved, and forced to recognise not only the possibility of happiness but happiness itself would be for her to enter upon an experience for which she was not prepared and in which she might find a new kind of suffering. (*LFF* 254)

It is obvious, judging from these passages, that Constance is portrayed as a truly complex figure whose motivations are deeply psychological and rooted in her painful past. Her proudly contemptuous behaviour towards the locals of Kinlochgarvie and her often cruel treatment of her own daughter and brother should make us dislike her; indeed, a review of the novel argues that the reader is 'asked to accept Constance's quirks of behaviour without being made to understand her'.¹⁰ However, Jenkins's subtly compassionate approach to her inner dilemmas encourages us to sympathise with this unusual character. The narrative makes it clear that Constance hardly understands her own feelings towards Carstares, as revealed at one point when she kisses him: 'she could not have said whether she was kissing him out of liking and gratitude, or out of resentment deeper than those' (*LFF* 164). Phrases like, 'she shrank from the admission that she loved him, as from an adder unseen in the grass', and 'she found herself still so weak, so afraid, and so desperate for comfort that could not be asked for' (*LFF* 240), reveal the agony of Constance's inner struggle. As we can see, Jenkins's portrayal of Constance is certainly that of depth, complexity and understanding. The anonymous critic's assertion is accordingly unjustified in light of how far we are given access to Constance's thoughts.

The love story of *Love is a Fervent Fire* clearly reflects aspects of the poem upon which the novel's title is based. The liaison of Carstares and Constance does in fact show all the paradoxes of love that Scott so sceptically refers to in his Rondel; love yields 'Short plesour' and 'lang displesour', yet it is 'Ane puir tressour without mesour' (lines 9 and 11). We could therefore conclude that this novel is not only a very complex study of character and circumstance, but also very clearly a clever exploration of the many ironies of love. While *So Gaily Sings the Lark* does to some extent address the paradoxical sentiments that often go hand in hand with sexual love—such as jealousy, fear, resentment—it is nowhere nearly as sophisticated and subtle in its exploration of the psychology of love as is this later novel. Moreover, the hero and heroine of *Love is a Fervent Fire* are not the only characters through whom Jenkins explores the concept of love. In the community of Kinlochgarvie, love and the lack of it takes many forms: Muriel Kim, the spinsterish hotel owner, sees herself as wandering across the 'stone hills of lovelessness' (*LFF* 41) before getting together with her barman, Jock; the long-term sexual starvation of schoolmistress Helen Carmichael drives her insane so that she starts lifting her skirts to passers-by, 'like a small girl finding revenge in her naughtiness' (*LFF* 118); and Ezra Strone's grief for his

dead wife makes him behave absurdly, so that he wears his wife's bracelet and scent, and proposes to have sex with Mrs McKerrol with the 'desperation, incoherence, and cunning of a child' (*LFF* 215). Within Jenkins's emphasis on the fact that love can be found in many forms—such as Jock's genuine yet realistic affection for Miss Kirn—there is also the suggestion that love can truly be blind. Constance's reflection that Mrs McKerrol's love for her husband is blind ironically points to the one whose love for herself *truly* is blind: her fiancé Carstares. Jenkins's exploration of love is thus often highly ironical here, yet his portrayal of its effects on his characters remains deeply compassionate. Jock's assertion that love 'is a frog that jumps in all directions' (*LFF* 226) emphasises the essence of Jenkins's argument which maintains that love is indeed a very unpredictable emotion.

Despite all this, *Love is a Fervent Fire* has one of Jenkins's more optimistic conclusions, as emphasised in the very last passage of the novel. Constance kisses Carstares and sees the stars above his head as 'a promise not only of an immensity of time in which to learn to cultivate love, but also of forgiveness if, in that cultivation, perfection could not be achieved' (*LFF* 254). Although this seems a rather abrupt affirmation of the positive, this conclusion clearly differs from *So Gaily Sings the Lark* in its overt revelation that the heroine has decided to follow her heart despite the risks she feels are involved in marrying Carstares. Yet Jenkins makes it clear that it may be difficult to achieve perfection in this relationship, while also emphasising that love, though imperfect, fallible, and often poisoned by selfishness or other negative human characteristics, should always be cherished no matter how limited. The ironies and paradoxes of love are there; we have to accept that our love for one another is always subject to our own fallibility.

Love is a Fervent Fire presents a clear comment on the possible effects of sexual starvation and physical repression, and the novel suggests that thwarted sexuality originates in moral considerations imposed by religious and social ideologies. Muriel Kirn and Helen Carmichael are both spinsters in their fifties, but whereas Miss Kirn seeks satisfaction through observing the sexual activities of her hotel guests, and through her possession of a small statue of naked Achilles, her friend Miss Carmichael has a more difficult time in overcoming her frustrations. Thus, while Miss Kirn sees Carstares's expected arrival as a guest in her hotel as a welcome opportunity to practice her peculiar voyeurism, his coming to Kinlochgarvie affects the schoolmistress in an entirely different way. Her misunderstanding that he is Alison Weir's father thus sets off her mental degeneration. Miss Carmichael's virginity makes her see Carstares as 'destructive, for he was her own life unfulfilled' (*LFF* 33), and her strange fixation on his relation with Constance Kilgour—a fixation partly caused by jealousy—eventually causes her obscene telephone-calls to Muriel Kirn and Ronald Kilgour of Garvie House. The novel thereby

implies that the lifelong suppression of Miss Carmichael's sexuality finally erupts in the form of 'meaningless obscenity' (*LFF* 86). Indeed, the disturbing change in her conduct is made quite explicit: 'Helen, a goddess among children, now sounded like a nasty, greedy child gobbling sweets in haste lest others should come for a share' (*LFF* 40). Miss Carmichael is an example of someone whose extreme sense of morality and prudishness has, so to speak, driven them mad, as indicated through Carstares's viewpoint: 'she involuntarily showed indications of desire still smouldering after innumerable drenchings of professional morality and natural prudishness' (*LFF* 118).

Mr Strone the forester is another example of a sexually repressed person. Strone is a dour, inexpressive man, whose name echoes his outer appearance of stoicism and endurance, while he suffers greatly within because of his wife's fatal illness and later death. After his wife's death, Strone's inner conflicts regarding his sexuality and his wife's goodness are emphasised in the revelation that his refusal to have sex with her clearly originated in both disgust at his and her humanity and physicality, and in his sense of impotence in the face of Margaret's goodness:

... so many times ... he had denied Margaret, pretending he did not wish to risk injuring her in her frail condition, but really punishing herself and him, for what he could not say, perhaps just for being human beings, with bodies demanding appeasement in so filthy a manner, or perhaps because there had been in Margaret something that had made him impotent, her goodness, maybe, or what other people called her goodness. (*LFF* 215)

Strone and his dilemma point towards at least two major concerns within Jenkins's fiction. Firstly, the constant need to transcend our own physicality—Jenkins often describes sex as very sordid and animalistic—and the simultaneous knowledge that we do have physical demands which have to be fulfilled. Secondly, the uneasy reaction of people to what appears to be 'real' goodness, as manifested in the community's reaction to Donald Grant and Isobel Kinross in *So Gaily Sings the Lark*, and which, in this case, causes Strone's impotence. Strone is an important character, both in terms of the novel's treatment of sexuality, goodness, and the moral significance of these, and also in relation to Jenkins's overall examination of these issues.

Finally, the Glaswegian barman, Jock, is one of Jenkins's liveliest creations in *Love is a Fervent Fire*. Jock is the voice of common sense and genuine observation, and his character is delicately poised between the humorous and the thoughtful, thereby suggesting an authorial interest in his subtly philosophical perspective. While providing an objective, but insightful, commentary on the relationship of Carstares and Constance through Jock, Jenkins also uses the Glaswegian to remark on aspects of human nature central to his moral questioning. Thus Jock reflects, on his first night in Miss Kirn's bed and following her confession of 'dreams of vice and passion and lust', that 'every human being, from

murderer to saint, was at the mercy of passions, desires, and appetites that crept out of the dark forests of the mind like ravenous wolves; the darker the forest, the fiercer the wolves' (*LFF* 99). Jock's philosophy is evidently appropriate given the major developments within the novel. 'Christ pity us all', thinks Jock (*LFF* 99); the many people of Kinlochgarvie who feel desperate, unfulfilled, and inadequate—from Ronald Kilgour's 'perpetual hibernation' (*LFF* 88) to hide from his own cowardice and his family's degeneration, to the sexual repression of Strone and Miss Carmichael—seem to justify this remark and confirm Jock's vision of human nature. Moreover, Jock's comment that 'we're dependent on one another' (*LFF* 132) is central to Jenkins's overall moral perspective. In a view which may surprise many readers, the novelist sees his later novel *Just Duffy* as one of his more optimistic because of the protagonist's ultimate acknowledgement that people's dependence on one another is quite simply a beautiful thing.¹¹

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Love is a Fervent Fire differs from *So Gaily Sings the Lark* in that it is more directly concerned with the effects on community and characters of the protagonist's arrival. *So Gaily Sings the Lark* is less focused on these considerations, but is nevertheless a subtle study of character interactions, community, and questions of religion and morality. Both novels evoke a powerful sense of a rural community, making their various types of country folk three-dimensional and colourful. This would seem to be one of the main strengths of both narratives, although there are aspects of Jenkins's approach to moral and social issues which can be fairly compared with his later, more mature treatments. In this sense, *So Gaily Sings the Lark* and *Love is a Fervent Fire* clearly establish many of Jenkins's main characteristics as a writer. They are important to Jenkins's *oeuvre* since they introduce themes and issues, such as religion, morality, innocence, love, and the limits of goodness, that reappear and mature in Jenkins's later work. Furthermore, the novels introduce certain character types, such as the 'would-be saint' and the frustrated spinster, that appear throughout the whole range of Jenkins's work, while the inner conflicts and compromised goodness of Hugh Carstares and David Sutherland prefigure the development of many other pilgrims of conscience in Jenkins's novels. Within the central stories of both protagonists, Jenkins portrays the many contradicting ironies of human love, the moral challenges and compromises involved, its destructive qualities, and its essential fallibility. Love is imperfect because it is affected by human selfishness, pride, and material greed. Nevertheless, Jenkins argues, love should be treasured, no matter how limited by our faults, and this is one aspect of the novelist's philosophy which resonates through all his work.

Endnotes

¹ When tracing the origin of this song, I was given the following information by Alasdair Pattinger at the Scottish Music Information Centre, Glasgow:

The original Gaelic lyrics of the Uist Tramping Song (copyright 1937) were written by Archibald MacDonald, and the tune was composed by John R Bannerman. Hugh S Robertson, conductor of the Orpheus Choir, wrote the English version of the song, and arranged the music for the Orpheus Choir. The Orpheus Choir was assembled both before and after World War II, but the BBC banned it from its broadcasting programmes during the war because Robertson had declared himself a pacifist.

From this information it seems plausible that Jenkins borrowed his title from Robertson's version of the song, as it is likely to have been broadcast on the BBC in the late 1940s, preceding the publication date of *So Gaily Sings the Lark* by only a few years. The words of the song printed below are taken from Chris Findlater, ed., *Scottish Songs* (New Lanark: Waverley Books, 1998) 84-85.

So gaily sings the lark,
And the sky's all awake
With the promise of the day,
For the road we gladly take;
So it's heel and toe and forward,
Bidding farewell to the town,
For the welcome that awaits us
Ere the sun goes down.

Chorus:

Come along, come along,
Let us foot it out together,
Come along, come along,
Be it fair or stormy weather,
With the hills of home before us
And the purple of the heather,
Let us sing in happy chorus,
Come along, come along.

It's the call of sea and shore,
It's the tang of bog and peat,
And the scent of brier and myrtle
That puts magic in our feet;
So it's on we go rejoicing,
Over bracken, over stile,
And it's soon we will be tramping
Out the last long mile.

² In the attempt to trace the exact source from which Jenkins borrowed his prescript, I found the closest match in M. M. Gray, ed., *Scottish Poetry from Barbour to James VI* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1935) 252. Considering the publishing date of this book, Jenkins may well have used it for his prescript. However, there is a slight difference: whereas Jenkins uses 'f' in 'lufe', Gray's edition has 'v' in 'luve'. While Gray's version cites the poem as being called 'Lo! what it is to luve', in other editions it is called 'A Rondel of Love' / 'A Rondel of Luve' (see Alexander Scott, ed., *The Poems of Alexander Scott* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1952) 81; James Cranstoun, ed., *Poems*, STS (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1896) 81-82). The following is the poem as quoted from Gray's edition:

Lo! what it is to luve,
Learn ye, that list to pruve,
Be me, I say, that no wayis may
The grund of grief remuve,
Bot still decay, both nicht and day:
Lo! what it is to luve.

Luve is ane fervent fire,
Kendillit without desire:
Short plesour, lang displesour,
Repentance is the hire;
Ane puir tressour without mesour:
Luve is ane fervent fire.

To luv and to be wise,
 To rege with gud advice,
 Now thus, now than, so goes the game,
 Incertain is the dice:
 There is no man, I say, that can
 Both luv and to be wise.

Flee always from the snare;
 Learn at me to be ware;
 It is ane pain and double trane
 Of endless woe and care;
 For to refrain that danger plain,
 Flee always from the snare.

³ Alexander Reid, 'The Limits of Charity', *Scotland's Magazine* (October 1958): 44.

⁴ Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978) 273.

⁵ Winifride Logan, 'The Symbolism of Good and Evil: Studies in the Novels of Robin Jenkins', Diss., U of Glasgow, 1991.

⁶ To some extent, also, there is an implied mockery of Scottish Renaissance usage of symbols such as the rowan tree, as seen, for instance, in Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings* (1941).

⁷ Kirstie's move from David to Kinross could symbolically suggest the move of a rural Scotland towards an urban one. In Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song* (1932), Chris Guthrie is presented as torn between her desire to learn and her love of the land. Chris is therefore perceived as torn between the rural and the urban; Kirstie Hamilton faces a similar dilemma, only she is torn between two men and what they represent for her.

⁸ Personal Interview 16.

⁹ Alastair R. Thompson, 'Faith and Love: An Examination of some themes in the novels of Robin Jenkins', *New Saltire* 3 (1963): 61.

¹⁰ 'Predictable Passions', rev. of *Love is a Fervent Fire*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 3 July 1959: 397.

¹¹ Personal Interview 19.

Chapter 2:

The Betrayal of Innocence: *Happy for the Child* (1953) and *The Changeling* (1958)

The novels dealt with in this chapter have a difference in emphasis from *So Gaily Sings the Lark* and *Love is a Fervent Fire*, especially since each of the narratives examined in chapter one are love stories set in the countryside while *Happy for the Child* and *The Changeling* are more immediately concerned with issues that are directly relevant to urban settings. This is the case even though a major part of *The Changeling* takes place in Argyll because *Happy for the Child* and *The Changeling* both examine the effects of poverty and deprivation in Scottish society more closely than the novels previously considered. These two novels by Jenkins are therefore early examples of his strong preoccupation with the unfairness of social distinction and its influence on his characters. Both narratives convey a bleak vision of Scottish society, leaving meagre joy or fulfilment for those of its inhabitants suffering poverty, unemployment, and squalid housing conditions. Moreover, they are among many in which Jenkins's concern with and for children is emphasised. His remarkably insightful, sophisticated and compassionate approach to children is evident here in his presentation of John Stirling, Sam Gourlay, Tom Curdie, Gillian Forbes, and others. Jenkins's preoccupation with innocence, its preciousness, and its vulnerability, is clear in his portrayal of the children of both novels, and the ultimate bleakness of the narratives leaves this innocence sadly betrayed or destroyed. Jenkins's experiences, both during his own childhood in industrial Lanarkshire, and as a school teacher in Glasgow's East End slums are clearly reflected in both stories.

There are other parallels between the two novels that are in line with the main topics of this study. Jenkins's criticism of class distinction is consistently layered with an insistent moral questioning achieved through ironic complexities of characters and plot. Although the portrayal of John Stirling and his opposite Sam Gourlay seems initially to establish absolutes of good and evil through the two boys, the narrative gradually deconstructs these through revealing Stirling's petty anxieties when compared to Gourlay's much more serious misery. In a similar manner, Charlie Forbes's charitable gesture of taking Tom Curdie away on holiday with his family at first seems to show real compassion and moral concern, and seems to offer enough physical and psychological refreshment for the boy to help him escape the sordidness and criminality of the slum. Yet the tragic climax of the story ultimately reveals the limitations of the teacher's charity and questions the morality of a society which offers no real alternatives to its dispossessed young people.

Clearly, therefore, these two novels are highly important to the moral dimension of Jenkins's fiction.

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Happy for the Child, referred to by Maurice Lindsay as 'a sensitive evocation of a Scottish childhood',¹ is by Jenkins's own admission semi-autobiographical.² Apart from sharing Jenkins's Christian name (Jenkins is known to his friends by his original Christian name, John), John Stirling's situation is similar to the author's own: a father who died during the war, 'a poor home, a hard-working mother, a bursary to a fee-paying school (Hamilton Academy), a brilliant scholar'.³ While some of these parallels are later repeated in Gavin Hamilton of *A Would-Be Saint*, Stirling's situation is even more directly related to Jenkins's own through Stirling's avid reading of Robert Louis Stevenson's fiction. Jenkins expresses his admiration for Stevenson's writing and especially *Kidnapped* (1886),⁴ which again features prominently in *Happy for the Child*. Thus it would seem that this early novel is the most directly influenced by Jenkins's own experience, at least in terms of authorial identification with one particular character.⁵

It is also important to remember Jenkins's admiration for Stevenson when analysing the significance of the title of *Happy for the Child*. The title is taken from a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson:

Home was home then, my dear, full of kindly faces,
 Home was home then, my dear, happy for the child.
 Fire and the windows bright glittered on the moorland;
 Song, tuneful song, built a palace in the wild.
 Now, when day dawns on the brow of the moorland,
 Lone stands the house, and the chimney-stone is cold.
 Lone let it stand, now the friends are all departed,
 The kind hearts, the true hearts, that loved the place of old.⁶

The nostalgic tone of Stevenson's poem reflects Stirling's sensitive and romantic nature, and his tendency to seek escape from the reality of his life through romantic fiction is emphasised in the frequent references to Stevenson in the novel. Stirling's own bleak background and the more brutal circumstances of Gourlay are then perceived in sharp contrast with the concepts of nostalgia, romance, and escape that have been evoked through the connection with Stevenson. The title of the novel is therefore clearly ironical; the poem from which it is taken refers to an older Scotland which offered comfort, happiness, and warmth to its children, while Jenkins's evocation of such nostalgia is countered by the narrative's emphasis on the title's inappropriateness to the world portrayed in the novel. Or, as Norquay argues: 'There are ... few happy faces for the children in the novel, nor are the homes presented as places of warmth and security'.⁷

Jenkins's admiration for Stevenson is also important in light of the fact that Stevenson does, in some ways, become important to the central development of the plot. Stirling's intelligence and his success at Muirton Academy are clear signposts towards further success. This is something which Stirling already visualises early in the narrative:

... he glanced about him with guilty frightened resentment at the besieging poverty. Some day for revenge he would live in a large house with its name in gold letters on glass above the front door; it would have a garden coloured with flowers, and would be full of dear furniture. He himself would be dressed in expensive clothes, not a darned jersey and patched shorts. (HC 10)

Stirling yearns for escape from his unsatisfying and poverty-stricken life, and this dream, Jenkins implies, might later be realised through Stirling's creative capabilities: he is praised by his teachers for composition, and a teacher at the Academy thinks, on the first day of school, that perhaps Stirling 'was to be another Dailly, perhaps even a Robert Louis Stevenson or a Walter Scott' (HC 80).⁸ Furthermore, Mr Malvern, the head teacher of English, welcomes the pupils of 1A, the intelligent first years, 'in the name of Burns ... Shakespeare ... and Robert Louis Stevenson' (HC 86), and it is made clear that Malvern shares Jenkins's own admiration for Stevenson's *Kidnapped*: 'Mr Malvern thought *Kidnapped* the perfect novel: those who preferred *Madame Bovary* were deluded' (HC 89). Stevenson therefore figures as an important influence within the story of Stirling's education, and is almost presented as a role model for the intelligent and imaginative boy. Furthermore, Stevenson's displacement from the Scottish scene could imply that Stirling will later follow in his footsteps by leaving Scotland behind. Norquay explains the Stevenson element thus:

... Stevenson, and what he stands for, does have an important part to play in the question of Scottish identity ... [He is] a symbol both of Scottish genius and of potential escape from Scottish environment - an escape possibly only for those intelligent, perceptive, sensitive enough to see it ... *Kidnapped*, with its patterning of flight and nostalgia, again epitomises the essence of Scottishness, a conjunction of parochial security and the desire for adventure and escape.⁹

The main characters of *Happy for the Child*, 'the over-sensitive and very intelligent John Stirling ... and the graceless scapegrace Sam Gourlay',¹⁰ are clearly introduced in contrast to one another. While Stirling is brilliant at school, Gourlay is a dunce; while Stirling is a well-behaved pupil who never gets punished, Gourlay is a defiant prankster and is therefore frequently given the belt; while Stirling's mother is a reasonably independent woman despite her poverty, and works hard for his education, Gourlay's family lives off the parish, and his mother is a 'huge cruel desperate woman' (HC 19) who beats him and starves him. However, Stirling lacks Gourlay's most obvious quality,

courage, and this is manifested in Stirling's desire to conceal his background at the Academy. Stirling's lack of sufficient courage to defy prejudice against his background is emphasised throughout, especially through comparisons with Gourlay and, later, Robert Tull, and, as with many of Jenkins's adult characters (and moral pilgrims), Stirling is aware of major flaws in himself which cause suffering to his hard-working mother:

As always with him, the truth persisted in his mind, mocking the pretence, himself a coward, fleeing uselessly from his cowardice, in sand shoes thin and torn, with his mother behind him in the house weeping in misery although a smile from him would have made her happy and proud. (*HC* 17)

It is moreover evident that the two boys secretly admire each other's qualities. Despite Stirling's general satisfaction at Gourlay's unfortunate circumstances, we can nevertheless detect glimpses of genuine admiration—and even envy—for his former schoolmate's invincibility when taking the belt at school. Thus there is clearly a paradox in Stirling's overall perspective on Gourlay as presented through the narrative. Gourlay's presence provides Stirling with a negative alternative against which to measure his own position, his terrible situation reminding Stirling of how lucky he is. Yet Stirling envies Gourlay this kind of courage which defies prejudice at Muirton Academy against his background. Conversely, Gourlay, despite his apparent independence and lack of respect for anyone, has to admit his fascination with Stirling:

At the door Sam met Stirling coming in. He carried a basket and wore an ordinary jersey and patched shorts.

Sam went back into the shop with him. He held up the key of the house ... Stirling fascinated him and somehow he wished to talk to him.

‘Hello, Stirling,’ he said, grinning. (*HC* 178)

The relationship of Stirling and Gourlay is a mixture of scorn and admiration on both sides, but Jenkins's presentation of his two main characters also emphasises the internal hierarchy of the slum. The hard-earned respectability of the Stirlings is juxtaposed with the dirty savagery and degradation of the Gourlay family, and an early encounter between Stirling and Gourlay suggests a clear distinction between their families. Gourlay notices a considerable difference between himself and Stirling, views Stirling as a ‘great toff’ and looks at him in ‘sincere admiration’ (*HC* 63). As far as Gourlay is concerned, Stirling is from a considerably well-off family when compared to his own.

Jenkins endows Stirling with a hypersensitive nature, highlighting Stirling's painful awareness of his background of poverty, his own faults, and his ingratitude to his mother. This moral weakness is emphasised through the portrayal of Robert Tull, his presence at the Academy reminding Stirling and the reader of Stirling's cowardice and sensitivity. Tull's light-hearted indifference to the opinion of others, and his openly expressed love and admiration for his crippled father are characteristics that sharply contrast with the cowardly

shame of Stirling, who feels that his mother 'represented for him all the deprivations and denials of his life' (*HC* 6). Furthermore, Stirling's own awareness of his cruel ingratitude towards his mother is intensified still more by Tull: 'Stirling sneered, but really he envied Tull his merriment, not because it made him popular, but because it made him impregnable' (*HC* 73). As a result, Tull is important to Stirling's recognition of his own faults. Tull is a type of character that appears in several of Jenkins's novels. His cheerful and proud acceptance of his circumstance is later echoed in Douglas McIntyre of *A Would-Be Saint*, and Smout (William) McTavish of *Fergus Lamont*.

The initial presentation of Stirling and Gourlay seems to establish clear-cut binary opposites of good and evil. Thus Stirling's privileged status as the 'lad o' pairts' and his obvious sensitivity are presented in stark contrast to Gourlay's stupidity and nastiness, and Stirling's view of Gourlay's pinning of earwigs to the fence post clearly establishes an image that is symbolically linked with pure evil:

Stirling saw in a glance what they were doing. Part of that sport he had played at himself once ... The part he had not played caused him to shudder just as it was causing Gourlay to grin in comradely glee. As each earwig came out [of the fence post], Gourlay had seized it, with iron-fingered audacity, and set it on top of the fence rail where he had impaled it with a pin ... [The earwigs] all wriggled in a strangely similar way, lifting up their heads and tails in a sort of dance, and seeming to utter cries of pain too remote to be heard. (*HC* 24)

Egged on by his deceitful pal Charlie Dean, Gourlay gleefully compares the lot of the earwigs to Christ's: "'See them?'" he cried. "Like a lot of wee Christs'" (*HC* 24). This element of Biblical imagery is clearly suggestive of evil in Gourlay's action, and the earwigs thereby assume a greater significance relating to the sacrifice of Jesus to atone for the sins of humanity. This idea is emphasised in *A Would-Be Saint*, through Gavin Hamilton's thoughts on a similar incident: 'At the time ... he had not thought of Christ on the Cross, but years later, when the significance of the Crucifixion had become clearer to him, he had understood that cruelty even to earwigs kept the nails sharp' (*WBS* 129). Importantly, Jenkins has elsewhere commented that cruelty to earwigs and insects represents to him the evil of the world.¹¹

Gourlay's peculiar defeat towards the end of the novel does not escape Stirling's attention, and the encounter with the changed Gourlay gives him a certain satisfaction, so that he feels 'as superior to the other boy as good is to evil' (*HC* 214). There is a clear echo here from the earlier scene of the crucifixion of the earwigs, and Stirling's subsequent reflections emphasise this further:

As he went into the house he was laughing at this demonstration of the ultimate defeat of evil and victory of good. The likes of Gourlay were always crushed, whereas boys like Stirling himself, clever and deserving,

always succeeded in the end: that was surely how the world went, that was how God arranged it. (HC 215)

For Stirling, people are either good or bad, and their fates are determined according to his crude and prejudiced estimate of the moral value of their actions or character. However, while Stirling's perspective accords with the actual outcome of the story, Jenkins's underlying irony undermines the absolutes of good and evil as held by Stirling. Norquay emphasises this aspect of the novel:

... the invocation of an absolute morality supporting that outcome [of Stirling's victory and Gourlay's defeat] is countermanded by the reader's own necessary concern, not with the smugly self-congratulatory Stirling but with Gourlay, sleeping in a coal cellar and demanding an alternative to his existence.¹²

As Norquay suggests, Gourlay's role as representing evil is called into question through a narrative perspective existing outside that of Stirling's, so that this other narrative voice gradually increases its concern with Gourlay's unlucky situation through the course of the novel. Gourlay's role in the novel becomes increasingly ambiguous, and our perceptions of him alter. There is much more in his circumstances compared to Stirling's that we are actually ready to sympathise with. As a result, we find Gourlay 'pathetic rather than repulsive', as a review of 1953 suggests.¹³ Moreover, as Francis Hart points out, 'the domestic wars of the Gourlays set a satiric frame for the Byronic boy-hero's [Stirling's] torments'.¹⁴ Consequently, when comparing Stirling's anxiety lest his mother's lowly house-cleaning occupation became known at the Academy, and his ingratitude to her despite her lonely and exhausting efforts to finance his education, with the desperate cruelty of Gourlay's unhappy life, both at home and at school, it becomes clear who is the real victim in this story. The empty despair of Gourlay's situation finally renders trivial the worries that cause Stirling's depression and isolation at school, and, as Glenda Norquay puts it, 'Gourlay himself overshadows the petty spectrum of emotions which are experienced by the sensitive Stirling'.¹⁵ It is surprising, though, that Norquay asserts that 'Gourlay's behaviour leads us to see him as representing the evil of the world';¹⁶ in spite of the boy's cruelty to earwigs and some petty thefts, he is clearly a victim of circumstances beyond his own control. Gourlay is the deprived child, the betrayed innocent, who, through poverty, other people's distrust, and bad upbringing by a cruel, violent, and bitter mother and a defeated idealist father, is driven to his troublesome behaviour in response to the injustices inflicted on him all round.

Despite his apparent stupidity, Gourlay sometimes experiences moments of insight which shed further light on the destitute nature of his existence. An example of this is when Gourlay's revenge on his sister Jeanie has failed, and Gourlay senses an essential

lack of something in his life which he cannot define. Yet he is intensely aware of its absence from his world:

Gourlay came out of the close and stood in the street. He tilted his face so that the rain streaming down his cheeks and into his eyes, diluted the tears there. But he could not deny the tears, nor stop them; nor could he say why thus treacherously they were flowing. It was not just because Jeanie and Donoghue after all had met, were re-united ... He wept for a greater reason: again he felt, but much more poignantly, that something important, something indispensable, something without which he must always fail as he had failed tonight, had come close to him but had passed him by ...

... There had been nothing in the purse; there had been nothing tonight; there would be nothing always. (HC 194-195)

Gourlay cannot obtain a satisfying solution to his dilemma, and the narrative makes clear that the social structures that govern his existence deny him this possibility. Gourlay is therefore left with no alternative at the novel's conclusion, and the narrative voice strongly implies that this unfortunate victim of poverty, unemployment, and the generally unfair distribution of wealth in his society is on the high road to criminality. By contrast, Stirling's brilliance at school is a means of escape from the limitations imposed by his poverty. His intelligence provides the positive alternative which Gourlay so desperately lacks. Significantly, Gourlay's ultimate isolation at the novel's conclusion—even his sister has given up her dream of 'saving' him—places him in the group of recurrent social misfits within Jenkins's fiction. There are elements of Gourlay in Tom Curdie of *The Changeling* and in Johnny Crosbie of the much later *Just Duffy*.

It is fairly obvious that the initially established opposites of good and evil through Stirling and Gourlay are inappropriate to our understanding of these characters and their environment. As the narrative progresses, the reader must re-evaluate his or her perceptions of these opposites and how they relate to Stirling and Gourlay. Jenkins's deconstruction of these opposites thus highlights how impossible it is to classify moral behaviour into absolute categories such as good and evil, and right and wrong. Gourlay's behaviour may often signify something which is morally wrong or evil—as does his cruelty to insects and animals—but the deeply disturbing picture we are given of his family and environment forces us to reconsider such preconceived ideas. The world of *Happy for the Child* is a world of ambiguous and questionable values and lost innocence.

In Jenkins's fiction, the deprivation of poverty is seldom depicted as clearly and bluntly as in the Gourlay family in *Happy for the Child*. The narrative gives a nightmarish picture of their tenement close-mouth, and their bitter and brutal family interactions. Mrs Gourlay is vulgar, cruel, and repulsive, and her general demeanour, added to her physical abuse of her son, make her the most unpleasant character in the novel. Even so, we are given sympathetic glimpses of her past hopeful youth, whose loveliness has become

embittered and poisoned by poverty and sexual starvation. On the other hand, her unattractive daughter Jeanie is one of the few genuinely kind-hearted people in the novel. Yet it is clearly established from an early stage that Jeanie's naive dream of saving her brother from further evils by taking him to live 'in a cottage by the sea with white and red roses climbing the walls' (*HC* 44), with her and her future husband Donoghue, is doomed to failure. The most likely outcome of her dream is summed up by her father: "What will the reality be? A single-end up some close with an outside lavatory to serve eight or nine families. There'll be nae room for her ain weans, if she has any" (*HC* 44).

Jeanie's father, an unemployed, disappointed and witty idler always in search of a fag, emerges as a peculiarly ironic voice of reason in the narrative, and it is through him that Jenkins's critique of the hypocrisies of class and religion becomes most evident. Jimmy Gourlay is a defeated idealist who expresses himself openly and unashamedly about human nature and aspects of his society. Thus, creating this character as a strange kind of philosopher realist, Jenkins manages to enlarge the novel's moral and social commentary to the extent that Jim Gourlay often seems to be Jenkins's own vehicle of expression. Gourlay is a significant commentator on the novel's moral and social concerns. We can, for example, recognise the truth in his observation on the law as often working against the poor rather than for them: 'The law's got a queer notion of decency. If I starve to death, it'll not interfere; but if I pawn my trousers to buy a loaf, and then walk the streets with my bare backside, the law will arrest me for indecency' (*HC* 40). Within Gourlay's ironic remark is a clear questioning of the real ethical value of social order as established by law, and it criticises a system that is flawed to the core in its double morality. While turning a blind eye to the suffering caused by poverty, it would nevertheless enforce punishment on those who are driven to break the law by pure need.

The scene with the farmer Gilchrist is one of Jenkins's best, and it conveys further the importance of Jim Gourlay as Jenkins's agent in the novel. The blindness of Gilchrist to the misery in front of his eyes is cleverly pointed out by Gourlay's realistic philosophising. Gilchrist considers himself to be a Christian, but the narrative voice ironically suggests the sheer arrogance of this notion through his reflections on Jim Gourlay: 'he sneered, and regretted that, being an elder and sure of salvation he would not be present when this louse crackled in the flames of hell' (*HC* 45). Despite being a 'Christian', Gilchrist dismisses Gourlay and his family as being unworthy of Christ because of their filthiness and poverty. Gourlay's argument, on the other hand, refers to the essentiality of Christianity, that Christ used to be for everyone, keeping His appointments 'with lepers, and penniless widows, and whores' (*HC* 39). Gilchrist's assertion that poverty comes through choice then further establishes his social and moral arrogance,

while, rightly enough, Gourlay calls Gilchrist's opinion 'blasphemy ten thousand times worse than mine' (HC 41). Obviously, Gilchrist's whole understanding of the Gourlays' lives is twisted by prejudice, and if he pities them, as he does Jeanie at one point, he pities them for the wrong reasons. His moral perception of society is clearly limited to his own interests, and his vivid but unpleasant reflections on the Gourlays' copulation and conception of their problematic son are, as suggested by Murray, more revealing 'about the unwholesome nature of his own mind than about the Gourlays'.¹⁷ In a central passage which evidently relates to Jenkins's perspective on moral and social hypocrisy, Jim Gourlay's voice emerges as a sharp reminder of Gilchrist's moral blindness:

The farmer put his hand on Jeanie's shoulder. He pitied her, not because she had been forced into betraying her brother, but because here she was home from a long day at work, and no good dinner was ready for her.

'Don't greet, lass,' he muttered.

Her father came creeping up to them. 'Don't greet,' he repeated. 'Is she to laugh then, and do a dance of triumph? Will I tell you, elder, why I don't believe in hell? Because I'm convinced it's beyond the ingenuity of even the Almighty to think up worse punishments than these. We breathe and we're in hell. Listen.'

They heard Jeanie's sobbing, a bus on the street outside, and in the house thuds and screams from the thudder [Mrs Gourlay punishing her son]. (HC 55-56)

This quote is very subtle in its implications about Gilchrist and Gourlay. Whereas the surface description of the two men would seem to imply that the farmer is a kind man—he puts his hand on Jeanie's shoulder and feels pity for her—and that Gourlay is an unpleasant person—he comes 'creeping' up to Gilchrist and Jeanie—Jenkins's presentation of their social and moral understanding overthrows this reading of their qualities. Gilchrist does not have genuine sympathy for Jeanie while Gourlay is intensely aware of the true source behind his family's misery.

*

While the moral aspect of *Happy for the Child* is focused in setting up and subsequently deconstructing conventional and binary opposites of good and bad, right and wrong, *The Changeling* explores the limits of goodness, and how idealistic gestures of charity can paradoxically cause suffering and tragedy. Bernard Sellin sums up Jenkins's main concerns in this novel:

The Changeling ... confirmed Jenkins' preoccupation with destitution, particularly that of the innocent, the orphan, the cripple, the poor, and brought out what was to become a recurring theme: the vulnerability of human beings on the one hand, and the necessity and pitfalls of involvement on the other.¹⁸

This pessimistic and disturbing novel suggests that the genuineness of moral behaviour can often be highly ambiguous. The narrative perspective acknowledges the kindness of Charlie Forbes's wish to help Tom Curdie, yet suggests that his charity is partly motivated by selfish reasons. The utter bleakness of the outcome is reminiscent of the shocking deaths of young Jude and his siblings in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895),¹⁹ and Jenkins's novel shares Hardy's vision in its suggestion of atonement and sacrifice through Tom Curdie's ultimate suicide. *The Changeling* is a more complex novel than is *Happy for the Child*. Its moral questioning reaches its double climax in Charlie Forbes's acknowledgement of his fallibility and in the subsequent and perhaps sacrificial death of Tom Curdie. At the same time, *The Changeling* is more intensely focused on the limits of human ability to do good than is the earlier work, and also more sharply concentrated in its general treatment of Jenkins's favourite issues.

The Biblical story of the Good Samaritan is central to the moral dimension of *The Changeling*, and the narrative voice immediately links Charlie Forbes with the Samaritan, while ironically reflecting on Forbes's situation: 'Though no one would belittle the benevolence of the Good Samaritan, in one respect he was lucky: he was alone with his conscience and his neighbour in trouble' (TC 1). The initial link to the Good Samaritan is maintained throughout the novel, and Jenkins's use of this Biblical motif is obviously ironical in light of the plot's development. Indeed, the consistent allusion to the Samaritan worth of Forbes's gesture emphasises just how enormous is his task. In trying to live up to the example of the Biblical paragon, Forbes's goodness will be put severely to the test. The narrative voice begins by suggesting an 'ideal' goodness that should positively affect the characters and circumstances of the story, but goes on to deconstruct that apparent idealism. This is a recurrent movement in Jenkins's fiction.

In his introduction to the novel, Alan Spence emphasises its moral seriousness:

As in all Jenkins' work there is a high moral seriousness, a searing, searching questioning into the very nature of goodness, the possibility of living by the highest ideals glimpsed in moments of transcendence. His characters, ultimately, have to face up to themselves.²⁰

Spence's last remark is particularly relevant to Charlie Forbes, and the insight given into other characters in the novel's opening chapters suggests that Charlie's goodness is in many ways questionable. Mr Fisher, the headmaster, thinks Charlie is a 'pompous bore' (TC 6), while Fisher's colleague Bob Black sees him as 'an awful humbug' (TC 8), and Fisher's reflections on Charlie's suggestion of taking Tom Curdie with him on holiday ironically point towards the ambiguity of that gesture: 'Originality of most kinds he distrusted, but original goodness most of all' (TC 6). On the whole, Charlie's fellow teachers appreciate his efforts, but doubt whether it transcends what they happily accept as

their own mediocre charity. The teacher Todd bluntly suggests the basic mediocrity of Charlie's goodness: 'We're all humbugs, Charlie; it comes so natural to us, it seems damned odd you should have to work so hard at it' (*TC* 41).

Yet Charlie's desire to help Tom Curdie seems noble enough. In taking Tom to Towellan²¹ with him he intends to give the boy a change from the nightmare surroundings of Donaldson's Court,²² and at the same time 'build up in him an immunity against the evil influences threatening him' (*TC* 4). Charlie believes that the refreshing beauty of the countryside will 'save' Tom, and thus the boy 'is to be a testing ground for his theories, for his faith that innate goodness can rise above the brutalising effect of environment'.²³ By transferring the narrative focus onto Tom, Jenkins makes it clear that Charlie's ambition to save the boy has failed to account for the reality of Tom's circumstance. The boy's mask of indifference and endurance, controlling his repressed feelings, is his way of survival, and any show of kindness will prove a threat to his self-sufficiency. Thus his breaking into the school is an early attempt to shake off the influence Charlie has already had on him. Tom already finds himself weakening and blames it on Forbes: 'It must be Forbes' fault. Ever since accepting the invitation to Towellan he had not felt safe; Forbes had been pestering him with kindness' (*TC* 29). By juxtaposing the apparent charity of Charlie's gesture with Tom's 'lonely independence' (*TC* 21), Jenkins already implies the danger inherent in Charlie's idealism.

As the narrative progresses, Tom becomes more drawn into the affairs of the Forbes family, and his influence on them disrupts Charlie's previously conceived ideals of rescuing the unfortunate slum-child from further corruption. Thus Tom's presence during the holiday gradually begins to threaten the happiness of Charlie and his family. The title of the novel is significant in this context, since Charlie's initial championing of Tom's interests eventually changes, transforming itself into resentment against the boy. Charlie's frequent comparisons of Tom with the changeling of Highland legend suggest that Tom's influence on the family is malignantly destructive. An early scene through Charlie's perspective anticipates this:

The danger lay in falling into resentment against Tom Curdie, in seeing the boy's admirable reticence as some kind of sinister senile composure, such as was shown by the changeling of Highland legend, that creature introduced by the malevolent folk of the other world into a man's home, to pollute the joy and faith of family. (*TC* 51)

However, Jenkins's portrayal of Tom's role as a changeling is both ironical and multi-layered in its nature, and reflects on both Charlie's character and on Tom's significance in the social and moral context of the story. It is moreover suggested that Charlie's labelling

of Tom as changeling really derives from the teacher's own fallibility, whereby the boy becomes a scapegoat for Charlie's inability to face up to his own shortcomings.

Charlie is one of Jenkins's many central characters whose sense of their own good intentions is put severely to the test through unexpected development. He is an obvious variant of the many pilgrims of conscience found in Jenkins's fiction. On hearing of Gillian's claim that Tom committed a theft in Woolworth's, Charlie has to admit to himself that his obsessive desire to help Tom was partly caused by his own professional ambition:

He could no longer deny that his finding consolation in the loveliness of nature, and in his championing of the meek and oppressed against such as Todd, had been insincere. The sight of the Sleeping Warrior in the sunset sky had certainly never compensated for his lack of professional success; and his Samaritan succouring of Tom Curdie had been motivated by an intricacy of selfish hopes. (*TC* 98)

This realisation has been implied before, through Charlie's own reflections and through his wife Mary, but from this moment on, Charlie becomes more and more aware of his own limitations. He is not the symbol of goodness and charity he believed himself to be. He realises that 'his compassion was academic, ... not creative' (*TC* 148), and that 'his heart was of ordinary size, composition and quality' (*TC* 169). As the story moves towards its climax, Charlie is moreover faced with the knowledge that his kindness to Tom has had the opposite effect from what he intended. While Tom's self-inflicted injury (caused by beating his hand against a tree) confirms Charlie's suspicion that by bringing him to Towellan he has 'done the boy more harm than good', Charlie nevertheless realises that he does not have the ability to understand the terrible depths and complexities of Tom's predicament:

... what dreadful spiritual stress had been responsible he did not know, and did not really want to know. Such knowledge he had not the imagination to acquire, nor the courage and compassion to bear. (*TC* 178)

Through the portrayal of Charlie Forbes, Jenkins emphasises the fallible nature of humanity. Alexander Reid argues that Forbes's kindness 'is genuine as far as it goes, [but he] is at heart a weak and ineffectual man'.²⁴ Indeed, Charlie's attempts at transcending human normality fail precisely because he is solidly and irredeemably positioned within the limits of this normality. The narrative perspective emphasises this aspect of Charlie and the paradoxical nature of his goodness particularly effectively in a scene during the family's trip to Rothesay. This is on the appearance of Tom Curdie's former pal Peerie, a freakish looking boy from Donaldson's Court who, along with his crazed friend Chick, has come to Dunroth to join Tom. Here, Charlie's reaction to the slinking Peerie subverts our previous appreciation of his goodness. Despite Charlie's championing of the deprived and oppressed, the appearance of Peerie immediately provokes the same prejudices in Charlie

that he dislikes in others, as shown for instance by his mother-in-law, Mrs Storrocks. Accordingly, he does not share his wife's amusement but 'scowled and muttered what sounded to her like "scum of the earth"', and Mary's feeling that his words are 'a judgement that might have been her mother's' (TC 143) signifies the contrast between his former championing of slum-children and his current prejudiced dismissal of one of them. More importantly, Charlie will not honour his daughter's sympathy for Peerie, when Gillian's sympathy actually echoes his own former expressions of sympathy for poor. Charlie is letting down his own principles in his attitude towards Peerie, and this is repeated when the Curdie family appears on the scene.

Tom Curdie is also crucial to Jenkins's moral and social questioning in *The Changeling*. It is in Tom that we see the most extreme effects of class confrontation, and his ultimate state as an outcast belonging to neither level of the society he knows makes him yet another victim of social division within Jenkins's fiction. Born and raised in Donaldson's Court, a very bad slum district characterised by 'dirt and savagery' (TC 17), Tom is a product of his surroundings. He is notorious at school for being sly and insolent and is on probation for stealing, and, as with Gourlay, there is a strong suggestion that he is bound for prison. However, Tom differs from Gourlay in being one of the most intelligent boys at school, and it is suggested that he would, like John Stirling, have a brighter future ahead of him if his situation was different: if he was 'properly fed, clothed, rested, and encouraged, he could go on to the University and have a brilliant career' (TC 2-3). Instead, he is 'malnourished, in rags, gnawed at daily by corrupting influences, discouraged everywhere, and perpetually tired through sleeping in a room with his brother and sister, where his mother and her horrible paramour also slept' (TC 3).

Tom's method of survival amidst the nightmarish conditions of the slum is simple yet deeply disturbing when viewed in the context of a society where some people have enough while others suffer malnourishment and misery through a situation beyond their own control:

Pity was never shown by him [Tom], only comradeship. For any creature whom he accepted as his comrade he would lie, steal, or suffer ... Never to whine; to accept what came; to wait for better; to take what you could; to let no one, not even yourself, know how near to giving in you were: these were his principles by which he lived ... (TC 18)

Even his mother, a vulgar and silly yet pitiable creature, cannot penetrate Tom's indifference; she is to him merely 'a phenomenon he had known since birth' (TC 21). However, the narrative early suggests that Tom's stoic acceptance is indeed vulnerable to kindness shown by other people. He is an unhappy child whose cruel environment has forced him into 'a total inner apartness',²⁵ but it does not take much to shatter this

apartness. Thus he is already clearly drawn to his teacher on the way to Towellan. Charlie's playfulness fascinates him, so that when Charlie blows the trumpet—an act of humorous defiance—this opens 'the first small window' in his mind (*TC* 59). Later, when watching his childish and clumsy teacher's playful catching of spoutfish on the beach at Towellan, his interest is clear: he watches Charlie with 'keen enigmatic attention' (*TC* 65).

The exterior remoteness of Tom Curdie is therefore shown as covering a fundamental sensitivity. Although he enjoys the stay at Towellan, he realises that it is changing him and proving a threat to his independence. Jenkins shifts the narrative perspective from Charlie to Tom in order to emphasise this. In a scene that focuses on Charlie's confusion as to the real motivation behind the boy's remoteness, Jenkins makes obvious the limits of Charlie's compassion for the boy. Charlie says to Tom: 'You must let your heart thaw, Tom, if we're going to be able to help you'. The passage which follows is central to both Charlie's inadequacy and to Tom's predicament:

In the darkness he could not see that the boy was trembling and biting his lips. If it had been daylight and he could have seen those signs of physical distress, he would not have known what caused them.

Tom knew very well, perhaps better than Forbes himself, what was meant by letting his heart thaw, because it was beginning to thaw, against his wish, threatening his whole carefully built-up system of self-sufficiency. He had, for instance, enjoyed being out in the lonely boat in the dark sea more than anything else in his life; and Forbes, whom he had intended to despise and cheat, he now found himself liking, more than liking, yearning for, so that he could scarcely bear the teacher to be out of his sight. ...

All the time, too, he had to remember that he would have to go back to Donaldson's Court, and if he went back with his heart thawed by too much love for these people, and with his independence therefore destroyed by them, he would become as lost as Peerie or Chick or his brother Alec. (*TC* 73-74)

Through juxtaposing two different narrative perspectives, Jenkins skilfully implies the paradox inherent in the situation. Goodness can be 'cruel' in being a threat to the basic need for survival, and despite the best intentions, kindness is liable to fail when challenged by circumstances it does not have the resources to deal with. Charlie Forbes's goodness is inadequate when faced with the complexity of Tom Curdie. It is beyond his capacity to understand what the boy is going through, and the frequent juxtaposing of Charlie's perspective and his troublesome family affairs with the much more real anguish of his pupil sets the tone for the tragic outcome of the story.

The intensity of the narrative uncovers the cracks in the relationships of the Forbes family, so that the breakdown of trust, and failure of love between Charlie and his wife, affects everyone, thereby pushing Tom into a further state of isolation. It is here that the title's significance becomes more evident.²⁶ Longing to be involved in the Forbes family, yet knowing that he does not belong with them, and aware that he has to go back to

Donaldson's Court, yet unable to return there, Tom becomes a changeling, trapped between two worlds, and belonging to neither. The society that made him, Jenkins suggests, has now destroyed him; he is an outsider. On another level, the label of 'changeling' is appropriate because, even though this is unintentional on Tom's part, his presence during the holiday proves destructive to the peace and happiness of the Forbes family. And even Tom begins to see himself as a changeling when he finds out what the word means:

He read it several times, until he could have repeated it by heart, seeing more and more clearly why Mr Forbes had applied it to him, and why Mrs Forbes had looked at him with such loathing. ... A sense of strangeness possessed and frightened him; his finger on the dictionary did not look like a finger at all. (TC 110-111)

Tom's telephone conversation with Mary Forbes reveals further his true state of isolation. Having 'left Donaldson's Court forever' (TC 120), he makes a last desperate attempt to renew and salvage his connection with the Forbes family. The boy is at a loss when Mary answers the phone: 'he could not speak; he had gone back to his own country, and had forgotten the language of hers' (TC 122). Having called himself Tom Forbes—a truly effective twist whereby Jenkins stresses the boy's terrible dilemma—his blood turns 'chill with strangeness' when he realises his mistake (TC 122). The sharp precision in the narrative's presentation of the exchange between Tom and Mary further accentuates the reality of Tom's isolation:

'Where are you speaking from?' she asked. 'Glasgow?'

'No.'

She sighed with disappointment. 'I thought you must have, even though you left your case. You had it packed.'

'Yes.'

'Why? Did you mean to go home?'

'I don't know, Mrs Forbes.'

She was silent again; she did not know his language just as he did not know hers. (TC 123, italics mine)

Thus impassable is the barrier that separates the slum child from those of privileged social status. Here it has finally turned into a barrier of language, even when Tom and Mary would seem to share that same language. The passage reveals how Tom has become an exile within his own society, unable to penetrate the world of the Forbeses and people who share their code of existence, unable to return to his old environment because of his lost independence. Tom is thus alienated from those components of Scottish society that he is familiar with, and in this sense he precedes the later and more developed and complex Fergus Lamont. Both characters belong with the recurrent social outcasts of Jenkins's fiction, whom Jenkins often uses to expose the immorality and hypocrisy of class segregation, simultaneously revealing the fragmented state of Scottish society through these characters' inability to function within it.

Tom's terrible dilemma is intensified still further in the last chapters of the novel, and the arrival of the Curdies, a dirty, vulgar, but strangely comical family, increases his despair and sense of alienation even more. The narrative moves with swift, chilling precision in the last chapter, which describes Gillian Forbes taking Tom to the shepherd's hut, and Tom's final act on their arrival there. The last time we get access to Tom's thoughts it is obvious that Gillian's attempt to help him, however sincere, will not solve his dreadful predicament: 'the shepherd's hut was for her [Gillian] a destination; but for him it could only be another place in which to try and solve what could never be solved' (*TC* 185). However, by transferring the narrative focus onto Gillian for what remains of the story, Jenkins ensures that the reader is not wholly prepared for the shock of Tom's suicide. Despite this final lack of access to Tom's feelings and thoughts, Norquay's assertion that Tom 'ends the novel as more of an enigmatic symbol than a solidly realised, suffering, character'²⁷ seems overstated. The suicide itself and the vivid, horrifying description of Gillian's attempt to loosen the noose around Tom's neck are sufficiently effective in making real to us the enormous scale of Tom's affliction. The feeling of entrapment conveyed through Tom's last thoughts, moreover, has already suggested to us the intensity of his distress.

The question that perhaps remains at the conclusion of *The Changeling* concerns Jenkins's choice of how to end this novel. Is Tom Curdie's suicide a morally realistic way to end the narrative? The opinions of critics vary, although most seem unanimous in their support of this conclusion. Thus David Craig sees it as the 'only possible end—a tragic end, which implicitly recognises the hopeless difficulties of thinking to solve dilemmas of class and equality by single acts of kindness',²⁸ while Reid argues that it is 'a conclusion which may not have been aesthetically right but was morally inevitable'.²⁹ Similarly, a positive review of the novel claims that its 'tragic ending carries real conviction',³⁰ and Maurice Lindsay argues that while Jenkins often uses melodrama as 'an aid to resolution, here again it is entirely justified', because although suicide 'is not the usual response of those confronted with such a dilemma ... most of them are not blessed—or cursed—with Tom Curdie's superior intelligence and sensitivity of response'.³¹ On the other hand, Edwin Morgan claims that Tom's suicide 'seems rather forced, rather too didactic'.³² However, Morgan's rather hasty discussion of *The Changeling* fails to take account of the moral implications of Tom's act. Indeed, does the suicide not emphasise the ambiguity of Charlie Forbes's limited kindness, and is it not therefore necessary to Jenkins's examination of human goodness in the novel? In fact, Jenkins maintains that Tom's suicide is inevitable: '... it was the only possible conclusion, surely'.³³ In highlighting the enormous plight of Tom Curdie, and in subtly underscoring the limits of goodness as exemplified in

Charlie's enormous failure, the conclusion of *The Changeling* is essential to Jenkins's aims in this novel. In a sense, also, Tom's suicide allows him to regain some of the independence he had lost, and thereby the bleakness of the conclusion is somewhat countered by a kind of positiveness, echoing perhaps a similar approach by Henrik Ibsen to Hedvig's suicide in *The Wild Duck* (1884).³⁴ Norquay's assessment of the novel's end supports this view of Tom's suicide:

Yet, although his death indicates the failure of humanity to achieve acts of pure-minded altruism and follow them through to their conclusion, his own act also emerges as a moment of transcendence; outwith the control of circumstances, unobserved, it is a positive action without compromise.³⁵

The validity of the novel's tragic end is emphasised even further when viewed in relation to other novels by Jenkins where the sacrifice of innocents is central to the narratives' resolutions. There is Calum of *The Cone-Gatherers*, murdered by Duror and seen hanging in a macabre crucifixional posture while the lady of the estate seems to experience a religious uplifting; there is Tommy Springburn of *A Toast to The Lord*, who perishes in the wilds of picturesque Argyll while Agnes Tolmie seems strengthened in her faith despite the murderous tragedy that has befallen her; there is the graceful and innocent Jenny of *The Expatriates*, who takes her own life after sending her daughter off to Scotland with the child's expatriate father. In all these instances, the sacrifice itself appears to suggest a deeper, almost spiritual or religious, significance, and, in most cases, serves to remind those left behind of their own limited humanity. Tom's suicide will no doubt seriously affect the Forbeses' lives and be a constant and disturbing reminder to Charlie Forbes of his tremendous failure. The sacrifice of Tom thus situates Charlie as one 'brutally rewarded for his do-goodings'.³⁶ Further, Gillian Forbes's horrifying experience is indirectly caused by her father's limited charity, and thereby she has become the second victim of his failure, as suggested by Spence: 'It is Tom, in the end, who is the sacrificial victim, and Gillian who is left alone in the darkness, finding no comfort'.³⁷ As a consequence, Gillian herself is another betrayed innocent. Her sudden insight into Tom's dilemma, her attempt to help him, and finally her futile efforts to save his life would undoubtedly haunt her for a long time to come, thereby robbing her of the kind of innocence that knows no evil or suffering.

Endnotes

- ¹ Maurice Lindsay, *History of Scottish Literature* (London: Robert Hale, 1977) 430.
- ² See Isobel Murray, "'Not So Simple Annals of the Poor': Robin Jenkins's Early Fiction", *Ideas and Production: Culture and Experience in the 1950s* IX-X (1989): 70-84. Murray refers to Jenkins's unpublished and in-depth interview with her and Bob Tait in 1985, where Jenkins says for example: 'Yes, I think to some extent *Happy for the Child* is autobiographical. Just to some extent, because I had friends later who said, 'It was nothing like that!', and they knew me intimately. But they refused to believe that it was as difficult for me as it was for John Stirling. I say this, it was every bit as difficult for me. It was so very difficult that I'll never tell anybody about it' (Murray, 77).
- ³ Murray, 'Not So Simple' 77.
- ⁴ Personal Interview 13.
- ⁵ I would argue however that Jenkins's latest novel, *Childish Things* (2001) is even more overtly autobiographical than is *Happy for the Child*. See my short discussion of the novel in Part V: Conclusion.
- ⁶ Robert Louis Stevenson, 'To the Tune of Wandering Willie', *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 1998) 224-225.
- ⁷ Glenda Norquay, 'Against Compromise: The Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *Cencrastus* 24 (1986): 4.
- ⁸ The idea of Stirling as following in the footsteps of literary genius does perhaps also reflect Jenkins's own ambition; since the author clearly identifies with the character of Stirling, and admires Stevenson, it does seem likely that the two relate to each other in this respect also.
- ⁹ Norquay, 'Against Compromise' 4.
- ¹⁰ Isobel Murray, 'One Toe in Eden Still: Robin Jenkins' Fiction', *Scottish Review* 38 (1985): 90.
- ¹¹ Robin Jenkins, interview, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', by Glenda Norquay, Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985, 443.
- ¹² Norquay, 'Against Compromise' 5.
- ¹³ 'Growing up', rev. of *Happy for the Child*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 6 March 1953: 149.
- ¹⁴ Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978) 274.
- ¹⁵ Norquay, 'Against Compromise' 5.
- ¹⁶ *ibid* 4.
- ¹⁷ Murray, 'Not So Simple' 76.
- ¹⁸ Bernard Sellin, 'Robin Jenkins: The Making of the Novelist', *Cencrastus* 24 (1986): 8.
- ¹⁹ On learning that his foster-mother Sue is pregnant again, young Jude is thrown into a fit of anguish over the burden of responsibility represented by the children to their parents; as a result, he hangs his two younger siblings and himself in a desperate attempt to help improve the impoverished state of his family. The narrative voice of *Jude the Obscure* implies that the sacrifice of young Jude is an atonement for the previous events of the novel: 'On that little shape had converged all the inauspiciousness and shadow which had darkened the first union of Jude, and all the accidents, mistakes, fears, errors of the last. He was their nodal point, their focus, their expression in a single term. For the rashness of those parents he had groaned, for their ill-assortment he had quaked, and for the misfortunes of these he had died' (Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (London: Penguin, 1978) 411).
- ²⁰ Alan Spence, Introduction, *The Changeling*, by Robin Jenkins (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1989) vi.
- ²¹ The visual description of the cottage in which the Forbes family spend their holidays resembles the old farm house in which Jenkins lives in Toward: it has white-washed walls, has a big lawn in front of it, and behind is the wood and the hills (see *TC* 60). Considering that Jenkins accepted a job in Dunoon in 1955, four years before *The Changeling* was published, it seems likely that he based the Forbeses' holiday cottage and its location on his own house. The visual and geographical description of Towellan and Dunroth also corresponds with the actual locations of Toward and Dunoon in Argyll.
- ²² Jenkins's naming of the slum where Tom Curdie lives is highly ironic. This is revealed on two levels. Firstly, 'Donaldson' echoes the glorious and romantic Highland usage of Donald or Donaldson. Secondly, 'Court' would normally conjure images of stately rooms of aristocratic estates, or even signify a Royal Court. The Donaldson's Court in *The Changeling*, however, represents the very opposite of romance, glory, luxury, and royalty. Jenkins frequently plays with names of places in this manner, for example in *Guests of War*, where Wallace Street—a name derived from the famous Scottish patriot, William Wallace—belongs to one of the most squalid and filthy slums of Gowburgh.
- ²³ Spence vii.
- ²⁴ Alexander Reid, 'The limits of Charity', *Scotland's Magazine* (October 1958): 44.
- ²⁵ Murray, 'Not So Simple' 82.
- ²⁶ Jenkins may well have been influenced by the Scottish moral fabulist, George MacDonald, when giving Tom his surname. MacDonald's novels for children, *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and *The Princess and Curdie* (1873) present a boy, Curdie, who enters the underworld and is at one point detained there as prisoner by the scheming goblins. Tom Curdie's role as changeling echoes the other-worldly, folklore element of MacDonald's stories, and Tom's social isolation means that he, like Curdie of MacDonald's stories, is held prisoner in a world which exists outside his true environment.

- ²⁷ Glenda Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins, and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985, 251.
- ²⁸ David Craig, 'A National Literature? Recent Scottish Writing', *Studies in Scottish Literature* I (1963-1964): 169.
- ²⁹ Reid, 'The limits of Charity' 44.
- ³⁰ 'Creation Myth', rev. of *The Changeling*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 28 March 1958: 165.
- ³¹ Lindsay 431.
- ³² Edwin Morgan, *Essays* (Cheadle Hulme: Carcanet, 1974) 243.
- ³³ Personal Interview 20.
- ³⁴ Hedvig, the daughter of Hjalmar and Gina Ekdal, commits suicide at the end of the play in the hope of proving her love to her father, who has rejected her after discovering that he is not her natural father. Ibsen implies that Hedvig's death restores order to the chaos that existed between her parents, although this means that Hjalmar returns to a life of illusion. Ibsen presents Hedvig's suicide as an ultimate act of independence, and this could have inspired Jenkins in his writing of *The Changeling*. Interestingly, it has been argued that in few other dramatists 'has the death of children so engrossed the vision and the mythology of the drama as in Ibsen' (see Errol Durbach, *Ibsen the Romantic: Analogues of Paradise in the Later Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1982) 73), which fact reflects Jenkins's recurrent preoccupation with the deaths of children in his work. Also, the same critic argues that many of the children in Ibsen's plays are symbolic 'child-saviours ... whose deaths are looked upon as sacrificial rather than accidental or suicidal' (Durbach 75). This definition would certainly apply to many of the children who die in Jenkins's stories.
- ³⁵ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 243.
- ³⁶ Morgan 243.
- ³⁷ Spence xi.

Chapter 3:

Religion, Myth, and Symbolism: *The Thistle and the Grail* (1954) and *The Missionaries* (1957)

The Thistle and the Grail and *The Missionaries* are grouped together in this chapter because they share the use of and reference to elements of myth, religion, and symbolism within Jenkins's ongoing moral questioning. However, their subject matter varies considerably. The earlier novel is inspired by Jenkins's childhood experience of football enthusiasm in his native Cambuslang, and tells the story of Drumsagart Thistle's struggle to win the Junior Cup while also exploring individual and communal sense of identity in relation to football. On the other hand, *The Missionaries* deals with the attempt to evacuate a group of religious zealots from an island off the west coast of Scotland. Yet both narratives have a strong moral dimension which is to a great extent focused in a central character facing a struggle of his own conscience. Andrew Rutherford and Andrew Doig both experience intense moments of self-questioning, and they are equally forced to a recognition of their own moral and social fallibility. At the same time, Jenkins's exploration of morality is also realised through the novels' focus on religion. In both cases, Jenkins suggests that religion has been replaced by concepts of football and Mammon, void of any true spiritual meaning, and the ironical approach to this issue is highlighted through Jenkins's use of symbolism and myth.

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The Thistle and the Grail is somewhat different from the rest of Jenkins's novels in the sense that its central theme is football. The setting is the depressed industrial Lanarkshire town of Drumsagart, by Jenkins's own admission based on Rutherglen, a town near the author's native Cambuslang, while Jenkins initially had Cambuslang Rangers in mind in his portrayal of the Drumsagart football team.¹ In 1956, George Blake described the novel as 'a long, resourceful, eloquent, occasionally coarse, slightly improbable and always challenging tale of life in an industrial townlet in Lanarkshire',² while an anonymous review of 1954 argues that Jenkins's townspeople are 'robust and real'.³ The novel presents a broad variety of people, but focuses mainly on male working class football supporters in Drumsagart, although the protagonist, Andrew Rutherford, has through nepotism become a manager of the local biscuit factory and thereby a member of the upper middle class.

There seems to be a general hopelessness in Jenkins's depiction of Scottish society in *The Thistle and the Grail*. Drumsagart and its people are endowed with few positive qualities, and the portrayal of Drumsagart as a rapidly decaying community where

malicious and undermining gossip thrives is strongly reminiscent of George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters*⁴ (1901), where the 'petty burgh' of Barbie and its 'bodies' (*Green Shutters* 65) is portrayed in similar but even blacker terms. This similarity has been noted by a number of critics,⁵ and Royle suggests that the football punters 'who act as a chorus from the terracings' are as central to the story as Brown's 'bodies'.⁶ Nevertheless, Moira Burgess is surely right to argue that the people of Drumsagart 'are observed with far greater compassion than George Douglas Brown spared for his "bodies"'.⁷ For instance, the unpleasant, ignorant, whining, even malicious Rab Nuneaton is ultimately presented in sympathetic light, despite his many faults. We see that Nuneaton has become what he is because of his miserable social circumstances: poverty, unemployment, too many children to feed, deprivation, and despair. Even Nuneaton's decision to go and see a football match just after he has buried his dead 12-year-old daughter has to be met with some sympathy, as we realise that this football match might save Nuneaton from going crazy:

'... But what good will staying at hame do? If I wasn't to go to the match I'd go for a long walk; and then I'd brood and drive myself crazy, and I'd come hame and say things I'd be sorry for.' ...
'... at the footba' I think I'll find my balance again. It'll clear my heid and my mind. I'll come hame a better man.' (*TAG* 159)

Despite his criticism of the Drumsagart (male) preoccupation with football, Jenkins clearly has sympathy for people whose lives are so empty of purpose that they have to seek pleasure, comfort, and fulfilment in what in Jenkins's opinion is merely a game.

While writing a novel which primarily deals with football, Jenkins wants us to see football as a hollow substitute for religion (or 'purpose'), from which the Drumsagart people—or, more generally, Scots—draw some assurance of communal or national identity. Jenkins has, in several places, made clear his intentions as regards his depiction of football in the novel. In 1955 he described the conception of *The Thistle and the Grail*:

I was born in and spent my boyhood near Cambuslang ... in the heart of the football country. To us those long summer games of twelve half-times, with jackets or jerseys as goalposts, were the equivalent of Huck Finn's adventures on the Mississippi. I did not realise it then, but the game was a wonderful and ever-present opportunity for studying character both individual and communal. [...] During the game one stood receptive amid all that indigenous enthusiasm, obscenity, wit, excitement, abuse, and fierce enjoyment. [...] So it occurred to me ... that I ought to write a novel about football, making use of that reservoir of experiences. It would be about a Junior team, because of the local patriotism displayed in Junior circles. [...] But it would have to do more if it was to escape the charge of parochialism, and also do justice to the people it would portray. It would indeed have to suggest the desolation behind this passionate dependence upon football, and to draw comparisons between this new religion and the old. [...] I think I

can claim that the book which resulted, with all its imperfections, is representative of Scotland, and has some relevance to the world at large.⁸

Later, Jenkins suggested that football 'was a subject deserving of severe satire, ... [although he] could not help treating it with indulgence and affection',⁹ and in his interview with Jack Webster he made clear his critical stance towards the sport:

As a child, I must have been aware that few people went to church and religion in Scotland was taken in a sober fashion whereas, on the football terracings, these people were baring their souls in a way you would expect in religion.

They still turn out in their thousands to sing Flower of Scotland, and I know of no occasion other than football where you could get masses of people doing that.

It seems to me unhealthy when any sport which is trivial becomes a passionate concern, giving rise to fanaticism. If only they could take it as a sport and not regard it as the end of the world if they lose, hating their opponents into the bargain.¹⁰

The novel reflects Jenkins's standpoint in the sense that football is very much portrayed as a 'surrogate for religion',¹¹ and this is perhaps the reason why Reid sees it as 'the only novel ... which deals maturely with the Scottish football cult'.¹² Manfred Malzahn follows this line of argument: 'Jenkins's novel acknowledges the rôle of Scotland's most popular and most proletarian sport, but portrays its redemptive qualities in a rather ironic light',¹³ while Cairns Craig rightly argues that the Drumsagart Thistle 'reveals itself as a microcosm of that national projection by which the sport of the masses, at every level in Scotland, takes on a special resonance'.¹⁴ In this sense, Jenkins's ironic depiction of football as religion is highly relevant to the novel's exploration of Scottish society and character.

Malzahn argues that there is 'something basically wrong about the world ... if football can occupy a place which may even let it take precedence over the birth and death of human beings'.¹⁵ This is certainly the case in *The Thistle and the Grail*, where a worried mother wanting to phone the hospital to enquire about her diphtheria-stricken daughter would have been prevented from using the public telephone if not helped by sergeant Elvans and Jock Saunders, the reason simply being the football enthusiasts' fear that they will not learn the results of an away match if the telephone is occupied. Thus the moribund Nat Stewart is among the foremost in preventing the poor woman in using the telephone, muttering 'What's a wean mair or less?' (TAG 202). Such cruel preference of football above anything and anybody is surely demonstrative of a world in which what should be harmless enthusiasm has become blind fanaticism. The Drumsagart fanaticism for football can therefore be viewed as analogous to extreme religion, as is clearly Jenkins's intention here.

With this in mind, and the Drumsagart hooligans' dependence on football as a source of energy and joy, it becomes obvious that Jenkins wants to criticise a community which relies so heavily on 'religion' for a sense of identity that it fails to see the sources wherein its real identity can be found. In this sense, football 'is both a false path to communality and a symbol of what that communality could truly be if only it was realised'.¹⁶ The many references to Calvinism or Calvinist ideas only emphasise how Drumsagart has become completely lost in its own false and narrow-minded vision. In fact, football and religion are so closely interlinked throughout the novel that it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other. Similar vocabulary is used for both football and religion. To name but a few examples, football supporters are called 'worshippers' (*TAG* 68), the football players are referred to as 'martyrs' (*TAG* 169), goalposts are compared to 'altars' (*TAG* 172), and the referee is given the role of spiritual authority as he makes 'gestures like benedictions' (*TAG* 173). Even more important are references to the Cup as a 'grail' (*TAG* 47 and 169), bringing into the novel elements of myth in which the Holy Grail 'signifies the love of God, and the quest of the Grail the seeking after God'.¹⁷ This, paradoxically, makes the sport trophy shine through as a religious goal to be won through spiritual purity. Needless to say, very few of the actions undertaken in the name of football in the novel are demonstrative of such noble virtues, which makes the ultimate attainment of the grail 'tarnished by the means'.¹⁸ That Jenkins has named the football team in question 'Drumsagart *Thistle*' underlines the strong connection between religion and Scottish identity and further implies that Drumsagart is not to be perceived as merely a small Lowland community, but as an ironic symbol of Scotland and the Scottish nation. The fact that Scotland's national flower is given such dubious meaning emphasises the irony inherent in both the title and the narrative itself.

Not only does Jenkins successfully link football with religion, but also emphasises the historical significance of religious extremes by referring to the notorious Covenanting wars within his sarcastic digressions on the mechanics of football worship. Since the Covenanters fought for both their religion and country, religion has through Scottish history and literature often been associated with national feeling. Jenkins highlights this further by establishing football as having a religious and a patriotic value. Thus, while demonstrating how football is mainly a masculine pursuit, Jenkins suggests a similarity between devotion to football and devotion to the Covenant:

In hardly any case was there a wife exalted to forget the worldly interests of her sex in the glory of Cup-tie victory. *But then, had not the Covenanters themselves in their day probably failed to convince their wives that to serve God it was necessary to be imprisoned or harried or killed?* (*TAG* 137, italics mine)

Reverend Lockhart's words demonstrate the same idea, but his desire to bring about a religious revival springs from his opinion that 'We have become in Scotland a race of pagans, we who used to die for our religion' (*TAG* 42).

By creating the character of old boozer and fornicator Tinto Brown, paradoxically one of the more 'positive' characters in the novel, Jenkins demonstrates how religion, or Calvinism, has influenced Scottish views of morality. Old Tinto is seen by most as an irredeemable sinner who is doomed to suffer the eternal flames of hell after his death, because of his 'past debaucheries' (*TAG* 6) and his atheistic attitudes. Yet Tinto is portrayed as one of the more dignified, optimistic, and pleasant characters in all of *Drumsagart*. His merry and boisterous comments on life and football comprise some of the most delightful moments in the narrative, and it seems fair to claim that he 'comes off the page with the rightness of absolute truth and love'.¹⁹ Jenkins's ironic description of the local minister's condemnation of Tinto also reveals a critique of the false righteousness of the religious establishment. Lockhart sees Tinto as coming 'from the bottommost pit of depravity' and as a 'perfect example of Satan's handiwork' (*TAG* 43). To Lockhart, Tinto is an 'anti-Christ' and 'the most scurrilous enemy of the kirk in Drumsagart' (*TAG* 211). All this demonstrates how somebody who, as minister of the Gospel, should be the first to show compassion and forgiveness, but is instead all too willing to judge other people. Moreover, it is an obvious reminder of the Christian saying that we should not judge others lest they judge us.



Andrew Rutherford is a complicated character through whose development Jenkins again raises questions regarding the validity of idealism, community values, and the limits of human moral ability. In social and material terms, Rutherford is a powerful and privileged man, despite his working class origin. He is a factory manager, president of the *Drumsagart* football club, superintendent of the Sunday school, and a member of the bowling club committee. However, Rutherford has very few friends and well-wishers in his hometown, and it appears that, despite his acts of charity towards the poor, he is victim of much backbiting, malice and envy. It is moreover implied that the dislike of Rutherford in *Drumsagart* is partly caused by his promotion to manager by his brother-in-law Harry Gemmell, a cunning and ruthless businessman, whose wealth, it is suggested, may have been acquired through dubious methods. To Rutherford himself, his good job and material comfort are a constant reminder of his own compliance with the forces of a capitalist society upheld by class distinction, a society that his wife Hannah and his brother-in-law so vigorously support. This, together with the fact that he admires his father's constant and apparently genuine devotion to the socialist cause and to the poor, causes the great inner

struggle that Rutherford faces through most of the novel. It is first and foremost this dilemma which reflects once more Jenkins's interest in the human desire to transcend its own fallible nature.

Rutherford's self-questioning as to whether he is really genuine in his efforts to be a good and charitable Christian is important in this respect. Rutherford accuses himself as he walks home with his son after the story's first football game: 'I'm a fraud all the same, he thought' (*TAG* 36). At the same time, Jenkins emphasises the essentially flawed nature of all humanity through Rutherford's reflections: 'A fraud, he kept thinking, but how in Christ's name can any man avoid it?' (*TAG* 36). This question is central to Jenkins's work, emphasising the ambiguity of goodness and the difficulties faced through individual attempts at charity, and reflecting, for example, the dilemma of Charlie Forbes in *The Changeling*. As with Forbes, Rutherford's charity is gradually revealed as tainted by selfishness, and his generosity to the poor, it is implied, is partly his way of 'buying' respect from his fellow townspeople. In this case, the problematic nature of Rutherford's supposed goodness adds to and merges with the complicated and ambiguous nature of his social position. However, Rutherford differs from Forbes because he severely interrogates his own flaws throughout, whereas Forbes's understanding of his own limitations is initially clouded by conceit and social ambition.

Important in relation to Rutherford's role in the novel is his wife, Hannah, whose social ambition and moral views are fundamentally different from his. She is early introduced as 'snobbish, unbraw, icy-hearted, and stupid' (*TAG* 9), and later described through Rutherford as 'mercenary in her ambitions', and 'vigilant and hostile as any redskin' (*TAG* 32). Thus Hannah is presented as domineering and mercenary, and in this respect she resembles Kirstie Hamilton of *So Gaily Sings the Lark*.²⁰ Although Rutherford's more generous thoughts of his wife demonstrate just how complex are his feelings for her, his constant self-reproach is never entirely free from blaming Hannah for his situation. To him, Hannah is a representative of the capitalist forces that sustain a society in which some people have more than enough while others starve. Rutherford perceives himself as a coward who, by marrying Hannah and accepting her brother's favours, has betrayed his own—and, even more importantly, his father's—ideals for a society based on equality and brotherhood. Thus he sees his life of material well-being as 'his own cowardly compliance', as opposed to his father's 'lifetime of courageous opposition' (*TAG* 89).

Hannah's influence is unquestionable in Rutherford's mind:

How easy to become lost; and he remembered how Hannah's life was signposted towards what she called success. He had allowed himself to be dragged in that direction too, driven by his desire for harmony with her and

by that weakness which made him need to conform, to be like his fellows, to have the approval of the herd, to share with them even their most fatal mistakes. (*TAG* 81)

The passage underlines the basis for Rutherford's paradoxical dilemma, and it also reflects a fundamental aspect of Jenkins's work, namely that of how nonconformity and social isolation battle against conformity and compliance with the rules of a materially selfish society. Compliance means taking every opportunity to advance oneself, and Rutherford feels that by doing just this, he is letting down his principles and betraying his social ideals. He does not realise, however, that his awkward and self-conscious attempts at charity, along with his privileged social status, have placed him in an impossible situation. He works within neither Hannah's nor his father's code of existence, and the people of Drumsagart, whose favour he so desperately seeks, reject him because they sense his uneasiness towards himself and his place in their society. In this way, therefore, Rutherford is a social misfit and is, to a great extent, alienated from both the social level he represents (capitalism) and from the community he wants to be part of (working class Drumsagart).

Old John Rutherford is extremely important in this context. He criticises his son for being one of those who uphold a divided society, and in their argument about Lizzie Anderson's dismissal from the factory, old Rutherford simply sees her as an unfortunate girl who has turned criminal because of her depraved background. It is here that the fundamental difference in the father's and son's outlook becomes apparent. Both may share ideals for a just world, but while old Rutherford sees social division as the sole evil behind crime and unhappiness, his son is not ready to accept this simplification: 'It's a damned simple view of human nature to think that poverty's a man's worst enemy' (*TAG* 88). Although we may pity old Rutherford for his lack of success in creating a more just society, we cannot but agree with his son that the old man's opinions are somewhat marked by bitterness, spite, and prejudice. Further, the narrative suggests that the father's show of emotion on behalf of the Andersons might merely be 'petulance, such as a spoiled child displayed when denied a toy too expensive' (*TAG* 84). Simultaneously, the son's experience of privileged life has made his outlook more realistic than the father's, because it has simply taught him that money does not necessarily bring personal fulfilment and happiness. As Murray implies, what the old man thinks of as 'an unassailable position of rectitude and social justice'²¹ is perhaps not so unquestionable after all, and Murray's comment that 'Jenkins's fiction always opposes such ready-made approaches to life, that pre-determine what people will see',²² is particularly fitting in this context.

Importantly, the old man's death signals a change in Rutherford's moral perspective, and Jenkins's philosophy on human fallibility is further highlighted through

this episode of the novel. Thought of by everyone as a champion of the poor who has proved himself genuine by staying poor himself, old Rutherford ultimately turns out to have some savings in the bank. Known to have always condemned banks and everything they represent, this revelation about old Rutherford's 'failure' to act up to his principles provides a release for Andrew Rutherford. His father the staunch socialist, the champion of the poor, the denouncer of the wealthy and miserly, has now proved himself no better than those he used to condemn. Although what he leaves behind is hardly a handsome sum, Rutherford now sees his father as no more perfect than himself. His personal fight for an unattainable perfection is over, and his expectations of humanity have consequently been proven unrealistic.

The old councillor's death marks a change in Rutherford's personality. Even though the people of Drumsagart find the subsequent change in his character 'utterly baffling' (TAG 255), they have to admit that he becomes a much more likeable person:

... instead of dour he became frank and uncomfortably cordial; truculence was replaced by bonhomie; and instead of sulking by himself like a scarecrow he marched out into the sunlight, like a farmer in a field sowing seed. The restraint was quite gone: the bud had burst and become the full flower; and everybody was astonished, and rather ashamed, to find it was a rose. (TAG 256)

It seems that Rutherford has at last achieved what he has always wanted: the good will of his fellow townspeople. His marriage too has undergone a real transformation, as he now feels that he 'could kiss her [Hannah], fondle her, make love to her, and feel it was all sincere' (TAG 267). Even so, as is typical of the work of Jenkins, *The Thistle and the Grail* does not allow such a straightforward interpretation. Several things suggest that the 'reformed Rutherford', as he is, quite ironically, called by the narrator (TAG 258), is perhaps in many ways not as genuinely 'good' as before. Rutherford's willingness to attempt a chance to win the Junior Cup by a protest, and his unscrupulous handling of the whole affair, show us a different, unpleasant side to him. Not surprisingly, we learn that 'the other, the former [Rutherford], had often opposed protests as being unsporting and mean' (TAG 258), and we find that his callous treatment of the Muirvale traitor is unlike anything that we would have expected of him before his 'reformation'. Significantly, the one football-committee member who feels uneasy about this is the only man on the committee who used to have some sort of liking for Rutherford while all the others sniggered at him behind his back and plotted to oust him from his position as president. Accordingly, the change in Rutherford is presented in rather ambiguous terms. This is further emphasised when we see him 'biting at his nails and trembling' in the bus going to Helensburgh (TAG 261), which implies that Rutherford might even not be comfortable with the change that has taken place in himself.

Despite this ambivalence, Rutherford's last visit to the graveyard before leaving Drumsagart for good provides us with one of Jenkins's most positive endings. The reason behind Rutherford's decision to visit Tinto Brown's grave in order to 'tell' him about the Drumsagart football victory signifies a central aspect of Jenkins's thinking: 'the whisper would not merely be the supreme justification of football, it would also be the recognition of the dependence of human beings on one another, living and dead together' (*TAG* 293-294). At Tinto's grave Rutherford finds Crutch Brodie, whose loyalty to the dead Tinto is the perfect example of true friendship, and it is here that Rutherford realises that the people of Drumsagart will never be his true friends, despite their change of attitude. Crutch's rejection of Rutherford's offer to walk back with him brings Rutherford the ultimate realisation of the story:

Rutherford saw, with anguish and yet with love, that he would be doing the crippled man a kinder service by leaving him to manage himself than by insisting on accompanying him. It was another dismissal, another exclusion, but this time without contempt or coldness or animosity: it had its cause rather in that ultimate, irremediable loneliness of every human being, which might bring regret and sorrow but which also ought to bring profoundest sympathy, as it did here.

'God bless you, Crutch,' he said, and walked confidently away. (*TAG* 296)

Following his recognition of the dependence of human beings on one another, Rutherford has to acknowledge that everyone is finally alone in this world. In his sympathy and love for Crutch Brodie he has found an ability to love and sympathise with other people and yet expect nothing in return. On this highly speculative and philanthropic plain the novel ends, and it is to me one of the more positive and definite endings to be found in Jenkins's fiction.

Malzahn argues, however, that the underlying hint is that Rutherford's 'new philosophy is just another delusion, since 'in a novel brim-full of irony from the very beginning, the perceptive reader must surely take this ending as an invitation to do some independent stocktaking'.²³ Yet it seems that however ironic the ending may be, it nevertheless leaves the novel's protagonist in a state where he has overcome his most complicated personal dilemma, and however 'illusory' his new philosophy may be, it is still for him a source of strength. By accepting 'the incurable nature of his own loneliness, which he chooses to see as an inevitable part of the human condition',²⁴ Andrew Rutherford has finally realised that even though some of us are lucky enough to have friends who love us, the person who is closest to us will always be one's self. Therefore I would argue that Malzahn is mistaken when he assumes that the ending of the novel suggests that 'the club has won, but Rutherford has failed'.²⁵ Instead, both have won: the football club has won the Cup, and Rutherford has now won a new chance for a better and

happier life, even though this includes a final rejection of his working class background. Accordingly, Rutherford's feelings at the end of the novel are no more self-deluded than are the feelings of the whole of Drumsagart over their victory on the football field, although the novel leaves it open how long Rutherford's realisation will sustain him. The real moral irony lies in the end in the dubious methods whereby both the football club and Rutherford have gained their victory.

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The Missionaries has been neglected by critics, and the existing critical material on the novel is mostly general and brief. In his predominantly appreciative discussion of Jenkins's achievement, Francis Hart claims that the novel is 'a book confused in mode and tone'.²⁶ However, Hart's reading of the novel seems somewhat confused itself,²⁷ and his assessment entirely lacks critical interpretation, being merely a re-telling of the story in a short paragraph. On the other hand, Alastair Thompson's approach shows deeper understanding of the novel: 'The book is a study of faith in decline and of faith discovered. It is rich in allegorical overtones and full of half-realised myths, none of which obtrudes any more than the shadow of a passing gull'.²⁸ Thompson's argument points towards the fact that Jenkins's familiar concern with morality, character development, and religion is given extra depth through unusual combination of mythical and symbolic allusions. The Sollas affair creates a framework for Andrew Doig's moral quest, emphasised through his campaign against the eviction and his journey to Sollas as the guest of Henry Vontin, the owner of Sollas, and Vontin's daughter, Marguerite. Jenkins's examination of human fallibility and the impact of religion is focused in Andrew's search for truth, and these elements of the novel are cleverly underscored by the use of Greek myth and startling symbolism. And even though Jenkins himself views *The Missionaries* as one of his lesser achievements,²⁹ the apparently simple surface story-line conceals a cleverly written story of fable-like quality which makes it one of the more interesting achievements in the earlier period of Jenkins's writing.

Jenkins's prescript to his novel is important in relation to the religious emphasis of the setting:

There is no such island as Sollas, in Scotland or anywhere else; there were therefore no such evictions as are described in this story, and the characters are likewise imaginary; but there was, and perhaps still is, a Christian faith.
(*TM*, prescript)

Despite this precautionary note, it seems obvious that the story of St Sollas is based on that of St Columba, and that the whole atmosphere of Sollas island is inspired by that of Iona. Sollas is therefore at least partly a remake of Iona. Like Iona, Sollas boasts a Sanctuary Stone, a saint (St Sollas and St Columba, respectively), and stories of miracles. There are

other links; to get to Sollas, the missionaries go through the island *Mula*, as with *Mull* on the way to Iona. Moreover, the historical background of Sollas/Iona is very significant in terms of the religious issues dealt with in the novel.³⁰ In fact, the quoted prescript shows clearly what the novel's main preoccupation will be, and Jenkins' argument that there is 'perhaps still' a Christian faith moreover echoes his own scepticism towards established religion, while also revealing a yearning for a spiritual belief untainted by material greed and post-industrial disillusionment. Thus the prescript anticipates the narrative's predominantly ambivalent approach to religion.

Furthermore, the historical background of the imaginary Sollas and the evacuations in *The Missionaries* carry echoes of the Highland Clearances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and bear a slight, though indirect, resemblance to the St Kilda evacuations of 1930, which have been called 'the most important [event] in the history of island depopulation in Scotland'.³¹ This gives the novel a stronger Scottish relevance. In relation to McInver's sect, moreover, Jenkins makes a subtle comment on Scotland's religious history: 'Their experiment, though wrongheaded, archaic, and illegal, had nevertheless in it some of that uncompromising staunchness in religious affairs which was so proud a feature of the nation's history' (*TM* 31). Clearly alluding to Presbyterianism and the Covenanting wars, Jenkins's use of the word 'proud' is of course highly sarcastic in meaning. The author sees the 'uncompromising staunchness' referred to as an integral part of the Scottish Calvinist psyche, and perceives it as lending an unpleasantness to the Scottish character that is criticised in novels such as *A Toast to the Lord* and *Fergus Lamont*. As a result, the question Jenkins may be posing here is whether religious staunchness is *really* such a proud feature of Scottish history, and whether it has not rather generated destructive divisions within the Scottish character, started in the times of religious unrest that followed the Reformation, and thereby echoing the ideas of Edwin Muir as portrayed in his poem 'Scotland 1941'.³²

Sollas island is a truly enigmatic and mystical setting. Jenkins describes his intentions in the novel:

The Missionaries was a deliberate attempt to create an allegory - a mixture of fantasy and realism. I'm a mixture of dour Presbyterian realism and another part of me which says to hell with all that. In *The Missionaries* I tried to create a situation in which miracles could happen - and I very nearly succeeded, despite being an atheist.³³

Indeed, not one of the whole mission seems unaffected by the atmosphere of Sollas, and the significance of the setting is emphasised still more by its effects on Andrew Doig, who sees it as a place 'where neither common sense nor wisdom counted much' (*TM* 119). In this context, Jenkins's employment of unusual symbolism adds to the air of fantasy in the

novel, while this also has further bearing on his treatment of religion and the question of divine interference. This is especially evident when a huge cloud shaped like a gannet is seen above Sollas Island:

It was the only one in the sky, except for those massed round the horizons. Right above Sollas, now less than two miles away, it hovered like a great bird with its wings outspread. Those wings, rimmed with dazzling brightness, were serrated at the edges; the head, with long sharp beak, was pointing to the earth. It was like a gigantic gannet diving. (*TM* 83)

If this cloud is supposed to have some supernatural meaning, it could be seen as a sign of God, since clouds are 'often associated with divine intervention'.³⁴ At this point, we would think that it represented God's anger at the Vontins and the authorities for driving His people out of the holy island. Later, as it becomes less certain whether McInver's people are indeed God's chosen, the cloud can also be seen as having been directed at the crofters for their 'gloomy conviction that they alone are sure of salvation' (*TM* 119). Yet, however vague the actual meaning of this cloud, and however coincidental its appearance, it nevertheless carries an implication of some kind of divine authority. Its appearance thus adds depth to the element of fantasy in the novel. But it also adds significance to the incident at the lark's nest, where Bull is seemingly prevented from smashing the lark's eggs by an unknown force, to the story of St Sollas being saved from falling off the cliffs by a 'pillow of seabirds' (*TM* 220), and to Nigg's death as he thinks he is being attacked by 'myriads of swift winged terns' (*TM* 167). The kneeling posture Nigg is found in by the Sheriff and Vontin is then echoed in McInver's death on his knees by the Sanctuary Stone, and both deaths thus convey an image of spiritual supplication.

The title itself already gives the novel a religious resonance, although it is soon established that the missionaries of the title are really the Sheriff and his team sent to carry out eviction orders on Sollas. But the religious overtones of the novel are intensified still more by the use of vocabulary and images connected with religion and worship. Thus the Sheriff asks Andrew not to pretend that his fight on behalf of the islanders is a 'crusade against the forces of evil' (*TM* 12), Marguerite describes the beauty and peace of Sollas island as amounting 'to a miracle' (*TM* 28), Rollo is described as 'monastic in his dark uniform' (*TM* 36), a naked woman in a pornography magazine is to Bull a 'priestess of lust' (*TM* 58), eating of dinner in Sollas House is 'like a ritual', and the table is 'arrayed like an altar' (*TM* 95). Also, Cloud's inexplicable cure is referred to more than once as a miracle, and the mission to enforce the evacuation has a 'religious atmosphere' (*TM* 114). All these imply that the religious, or quasi-religious, aspect is highly significant in Jenkins's exploration of morality in the novel.

Within this frame, Andrew Doig's perspective suggests that an age of materialism and sterility has taken over at the cost of 'true' religion, yet in thinking that 'great power of any kind, even spiritual power, corrupted', he has to admit that even Christ, 'the fount of compassion and love, threatened sinners with the fires of hell' (*TM* 15). The ambiguity of this approach suggests a questioning of the value of religion in the modern age as well as in the past, implying that religion has often been the cause of human cruelty and strife. Interestingly, Andrew, despite his role as the young idealist and champion of 'true' faith, is nevertheless a medium for scepticism towards religion early in the novel. Here one of many paradoxes in Andrew's character is revealed. Even so, Andrew's later reflection on church leaders as being 'obstacles in man's hard progress towards compassion' (*TM* 120) suggests scepticism towards the religious *establishment*, not towards the basics of religion itself, which echoes Jenkins's assertion that he is sceptical of 'organised' religion only.³⁵ Therefore, in thinking of religion as originating in poverty, Andrew comes to the conclusion that 'wealth, prestige, influence, and acclamation, were in the end barren of joy' (*TM* 116). The contradiction between Mammon worship and basic faith is highlighted throughout the narrative, again suggesting that the essence of spiritual belief has been sacrificed in the name of industrialisation and capitalism. Thus 'the very soul of man was being desecrated, in the name of progress, humanitarianism, and the sanctity of ownership' (*TM* 8) as Mr Vontin tries to effect the evacuation of McInver's sect.

The magnetic presence of Donald McInver, the leader of the Sollas sect, is important when analysing the religious commentary of *The Missionaries*. In fact, McInver's white hair and beard are Biblical in their implication, and his effect on other people suggests that there is some kind of divine force radiating through and governing him. That Mr Vontin, most of the policemen, and even the Sheriff himself are like spell-bound by McInver's performances points towards this interpretation of his function in the novel:

As soon as the singing stopped the Sheriff moved forward swiftly, lest it should start again. He had his hat in his hand, and obviously was determined not to succumb to what he considered the mawkish pseudo-religious atmosphere. He meant to make this great boulder [Sanctuary Stone] no more significant than any of the thousand others in sight. But suddenly his approach to it was as if to an altar. Donald McInver, with his head bare and his white beard waving, he had meant to treat with courtesy, respect perhaps, sympathy certainly, but by no means with reverence. Yet when the tall old man held up his hand as if in blessing the Sheriff could not have bowed his head more reverently had he been in the presence of and archbishop in mitre and cope.

That moment when McInver raised his hand had its effect not only upon the Sheriff. Everybody there was affected in his own way. Silence fell, in which the singing of the larks, the lowing of the cows, and the breaking of

the sea on the shore, were heard as sounds not coming from the old stale world, but from another new, fresh, and merciful. (*TM* 126-127)

However, McInver's power is instantly undermined by the possibility that he could merely be a man of extraordinary hypnotic abilities, and the claim by other characters that he is a lecherous old man likewise casts doubt on his spiritual worth. Moreover, the transition from defiance against the evacuation—McInver claims that God will protect his group from the law—to absolute submission, explained by him as the loss of God's trust, throw further doubt on his role in the novel. His eventual death on his knees by the Sanctuary Stone would perhaps restore some of our belief in his spirituality, if he was not at the same time in a ludicrously dubious position: his trousers are almost off. Could this perhaps, in an absurd way, reinforce the rumours regarding his lecherous nature? Or is Jenkins merely demonstrating some of his mischievous sense of humour here, as a sort of comic relief to the gravity surrounding this scene? Is this Jenkins's obscure way of undermining the reverence so often given to McInver in the text? Arguably, the paradoxes inherent in McInver's story reflect the paradoxes of Jenkins's own feeling towards religion.

On the other hand, while representing a religion which takes its inspiration from an older, 'purer' form of belief, renouncing worldly possessions and the laws of human ownership in the name of an all-powerful God, the presence of McInver assumes a strong mythical and symbolic significance through the association made with the Sanctuary Stone as an emblem of the birth of Christianity on Sollas. This is especially true if we think of the history of Sollas as that of Iona, since the arrival of St Columba to Iona has, to an extent, assumed a mythical dimension, and marked Iona as a symbol for the spread of Christianity in Britain. Arguably, McInver's devotion to Sollas and his death by the Sanctuary Stone after being in the sea—St Sollas was shipwrecked on the island and thus 'came from the sea'—could suggest a spiritual or symbolic link between him and the saint who brought Christianity to Sollas/Iona. Overtones of baptism and renewal are important in this respect, as McInver could, despite the ambivalent narrative representation of his qualities, symbolise the birth of 'new Christianity' into the age of Mammon-worship and sterile faith.

*

Importantly, Andrew Doig is introduced as 'the tall, pale, ascetically handsome twentieth-century Jason' wearing a university blazer that has a 'small blue Argo' in its buttonhole (*TM* 7). We are told that Andrew is a leader of a university debate society called 'The Argonauts', and he recurrently thinks of himself as Jason. As the story develops, it becomes evident that the Greek myth of Jason and the Argonauts is important to our understanding of Andrew and the issues raised in the novel.³⁶ Jenkins's deployment of

Greek myth gives greater depth to his portrayal of Andrew, another pilgrim of conscience, whose quest for self-knowledge and moral certainty is central to the story. In this respect, I would suggest that the myth becomes symbolic of the actual process that takes place within the plot. William Righter explains the idea of 'myth as symbolic language' thus: 'There is a variety of "symbolic forms", ... of which myth is a large, self-contained, autonomous body, with no explanatory value outside itself, yet within has a truth intelligible in its own mode contained within it'.³⁷ The myth of Jason and his quest for the Golden Fleece contains its own unique truth which applies to Andrew's situation, and the Argonauts' long journey to Colchis and the dangers they face on the way there can signify man's long and difficult road towards wisdom, self-knowledge, or moral certainty. The function of myths as 'marked by their relevance to men's questions about their nature and place in the universe'³⁸ becomes central here, and Andrew's progress towards a humbler recognition of his own failings and acceptance of other people's shortcomings—and thereby the renewal of his faith in humanity—demonstrates this clearly. Accordingly, the myth becomes symbolic of one of the main aspects of the plot. Further, it proves the 'means of conveying the universality of human experience'³⁹ to Jenkins's readers.

Andrew's passionate campaign on behalf of the Sollas sect⁴⁰ could link in with the ambitious journey undertaken in the myth of the Argonauts. The justness and sincerity of his campaign is however presented in ambiguous terms from the beginning. There are hints of martyrdom and righteousness, but these are given solely through Andrew's perspective, and it is moreover suggested that Andrew is merely trying to show himself as morally superior to others. He thinks of his campaign as 'compassion courageously displayed, and universal truth adamantly upheld' (*TM* 8), but these reflections clearly carry the hint that Jenkins's protagonist admires his own courage and resoluteness to the degree of vanity. That his idealism is thus tainted by selfishness is then further emphasised through the words of sensible, down-to-earth Mrs Crail:

'I've heard you singing away for weeks about these folk being shifted from their island, and I've thought, Andrew, it was for the joy of hearing your own brain and tongue in motion, rather than out of any love for the folk themselves ... You've never set eyes on this island, far less its folk ... You're in love with your own cleverness; aye, and with your own nobleness of heart; but that's a different thing altogether, from being in love with strange folk'. (*TM* 16)

Andrew's social and material ambitions also suggest that his idealism might suffer defeat, especially after he has met Marguerite Vontin, who will constantly be a challenge to his self-consciousness through her scepticism regarding his moral arguments, and whose sarcasm undermines the glory of Andrew's role as Jason. The unexpected acquaintance with the beautiful heiress of a millionaire thus signals a possible move from social idealism

to material success, as Andrew sees an opportunity for advancement through his friendship with the influential Vontins: 'He could not shut his eyes to sudden vistas of wealth and power and opportunity' (*TM* 21). Accordingly, there is a paradox in the narrative presentation of Andrew, so that the 'sanctity ... of property' (*TM* 9) that Andrew has previously so harshly condemned is now crucial to his own advancement. This suggests that Andrew will ultimately betray his ideals for wealth and power, or, if not for ambition, for his love of Marguerite. Jenkins's use of the myth of Jason therefore functions on a highly ironical level in the novel, especially when considering that Marguerite and her wealthy father can clearly represent the mythical Medea and her father, king Aeetes of Colchis. Andrew thinks of Marguerite as Medea on numerous occasions, seeing, for example, 'Medean depth' in her eyes (*TM* 121). Marguerite's influence on Andrew, plus the implication that he might marry her and thus betray his idealism for social equality that renounces wealth and power, further establishes her role as 'Medea of the many spells',⁴¹ or 'Medea of the many wiles'.⁴² This is also how Andrew often perceives her. Going to meet her for the first time he sees her as a priestess of Mammon whose spell he will have to resist:

In the eyes of a world which worshipped wealth and power, Miss Vontin was revered as a princess scattering largesse to peasants too superstitious and doltish to pick it up, far less thank her for it. Only the immune, who were very few in number, saw her as the representative of that brilliant ultimate sorcery which was transforming the souls of men into automata. Truly, he required the courage and the singlemindedness of Jason to go into her presence and remain unbewitched. (*TM* 23)

Seen through Andrew's eyes, Marguerite as Medea becomes an enchantress. Her wealth gives her the kind of power that can cast a spell on Andrew, just as Medea of the myth uses her sorcery to both help Jason and later destroy him. Yet Andrew's eventual surrender to Marguerite's influence is presented in positive terms, since this involves an acceptance of his own failings along with a determination not to be 'in future so quick to suspect the motives of those who possessed authority and wealth; he had found his own motives not above suspicion' (*TM* 226).

Further interpretation of the mythical aspect of *The Missionaries* rests upon the role of the Golden Fleece in myth. As the ultimate goal of the Argonauts' journey was to bring back the fleece from Colchis, so here Andrew hopes to gain his own personal grail or prize from his experience of the Sollas affair. Symbolic meanings of the Golden Fleece are various:

The multidimensional symbolic significance of the fleece has been linked to the search for fortune, the quest for wisdom, the failure to understand unselfish love, and male aggression. The fleece also has the distinct motif functions of providing the incentive for a quest, shedding light on the

pursuit, and revealing through the reactions of the questers their capability for self-knowledge.⁴³

Although the fleece obviously represents self-knowledge in Jenkins's novel, some of these other meanings can also apply to Andrew's story. When going to Sollas, he is seeking some kind of wisdom, spiritual or otherwise; in his association with Marguerite he may be looking for access to wealth and social distinction; and his negative attitude towards women⁴⁴ reflects a form of the male aggression that can be symbolised by the fleece. On another level, the myth is placed in somewhat religious context. The following passage juxtaposes the value of the mythical quest with the essence of Christian doctrine, suggesting a spiritual purity lost to the modern age as portrayed in the novel:

Few saw that the sunlit mysterious quest for the Golden Fleece was complementary to Christ's sombre inevitable journey towards Calgary; together, they were the inspiration needed for an age too smug for wonder, too mercenary for sacrifice, and too ethical for glory. (TM 7)

The incorporation of the myth of the Golden Fleece into the story of Andrew clearly adds to the subtlety of *The Missionaries*. It also provides an ironic twist to the question of self-knowledge. Just as the Argonauts' journey is a quest for something almost unattainable, Andrew's search for answers is by no means straightforward. Furthermore, as demonstrated in the tragic aftermath of Jason's return to Greece with the fleece, the possession of this desired object does not necessarily imply personal fulfilment. Andrew's thoughts on coming to Sollas and seeing Donald McInver and his granddaughter for the first time illustrate the idea of complexity further. This is when the enigmatic McInver brings a fragment of the Sanctuary Stone as peace-offering to the Sheriff and his escort:

Here then were the actual people whom hitherto he had seen only as abstractions. Now he could see, hear, and even smell them ... He could even touch them if he wished. But he could not speak to them. No words would form in his mind. It did not even occur to him to ask what the stone had signified; far less did he think of offering his sympathy.

When he at last left them he felt that that silence must enforce another upon him, as a penance for all his previous prideful verbosity, and this would not be lifted while he remained on this island, and perhaps might never be lifted at all. The Golden Fleece was indeed the true soul of man; but he knew now that though it was to be found within himself, it would take a whole lifetime of searching, with this revelation on Sollas as just one stage. In the end he might still never have found it; he might die with the glory undiscovered. (TM 94)

The myth is important as well as giving more depth to Andrew's character, and it places him within a group of other characters created by Jenkins who are faced with similar difficulties in their moral questioning.

Sollas island is a clear point of definition in Andrew's development,⁴⁵ where he experiences alternate stages of self-perception, self-deception, and self-revelation. Each

time he is confronted with Donald McInver and his people, he has to evaluate the group in terms of his fervent campaign on their behalf, not always concluding that they are worthy of his efforts, at one point thinking, for example, that what they represent seems rather 'forlorn stupidity' than God's grace (*TM* 125). Andrew's final journey to the crofters' settlement, his night in the cave, and his discovery of the dead McInver at the Sanctuary Stone then bring the ultimate disillusionment, acceptance, and change of attitude. Echoing the self-confrontation of Charlie Forbes in *The Changeling*, Andrew realises 'the academic nature of his pity', and that 'Martyrdom for the sake of principle alone was barren' (*TM* 219). His decision to shed the role of Jason signals the end of idealism and the acceptance of moral fallibility, reflected in his admittance that love, in whatever form, is precious: 'Love had to be accepted, in all its shapes; to sift and censor it, and leave out all that was neither respectable nor aesthetic, was to destroy it as an adventure' (*TM* 227). Andrew's amusing encounter with Sheila, McInver's half-witted grand-daughter, and his conversation with Fergus and a few others of McInver's followers, where they try to blackmail him, finally reveal to him that they are not God's chosen, but greedy, selfish, and calculating 'bastards' (*TM* 234). The ultimate moral revelation comes unexpectedly:

... he felt within him a tremendous lightening; he saw these small-minded, crafty, grasping, lecherous bigots as they really were, but he did not despise them; indeed, he found he could not, for he and they were members of the same species. (*TM* 234)

A subtle change in terms of love and forgiveness has taken place, and this positive change is based upon the acceptance, common to many of Jenkins's protagonists, that humanity is flawed. Alastair Thompson explains this aspect of the novel's moral conclusion:

Andrew Doig sets out ... dedicated to the proposition that society must be built upon the sanctity of the human soul and finds that the only sanctity the soul is likely to have is its sacred right to fall short of its professions into a forgiveable humanity. Yet his love of mankind dates its birth from that moment.⁴⁶

Andrew Doig's new love of humanity is eventually perceived as the much desired, yet elusive, Golden Fleece. This conclusion is one of Jenkins's more optimistic, and is therefore similar to the end of *The Thistle and the Grail*, yet both novels stress the fact that Jenkins's characters only learn the hard way. Both Andrew Rutherford and Andrew Doig have to give up in trying to reach an ideal level of goodness, but it is evident that they have both set too high moral standards for themselves in the first place. By not accepting their own fallibility, they reject the reality of their own humanity. The positiveness of both novels' conclusions lies in the fact that Jenkins allows his protagonists to lower their standards for themselves, while simultaneously leading them towards a transcendental understanding of humanity and their place within it.

Endnotes

- ¹ See Personal Interview 16; and Jack Webster, 'Why this rare Scottish talent hides potential classics in a farmhouse drawer', *Glasgow Herald* 25 June 1984: 7.
- ² George Blake, *Annals of Scotland 1895-1955* (London: BBC, 1956) 38.
- ³ 'Small Town Life', rev. of *The Thistle and the Grail*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 18 June 1954: 389.
- ⁴ George Douglas Brown, *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901; London: Penguin, 1985). All further references in the text are to this edition.
- ⁵ See Blake 38; Moira Burgess, 'Robin Jenkins: A Novelist of Scotland', *Library Review* vol. 22, no.8 (1970): 410; Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978) 274; Trevor Royle, 'What we need is more of Robin Jenkins', *Glasgow Herald* 19 November 1985: 11.
- ⁶ Royle, 'What we need is more of Robin Jenkins' 11.
- ⁷ Burgess 410.
- ⁸ Robin Jenkins, 'Novelist in Scotland', *Satire Review* 5 (1955): 9-10.
- ⁹ Robin Jenkins, 'Why I decided Scotland must be seen through fresh and truthful eyes', *Glasgow Herald* 12 October 1982: 11.
- ¹⁰ Webster, 'Why this rare Scottish talent' 7.
- ¹¹ Alan Bold, *Modern Scottish Literature* (New York: Longman, 1983) 207.
- ¹² Alexander Reid, 'The limits of Charity', *Scotland's Magazine* (October 1958): 43.
- ¹³ Manfred Malzahn, 'The Industrial Novel', *The History of Scottish Literature* Vol. 4, ed. Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1987) 237.
- ¹⁴ Cairns Craig, Introduction, *The Thistle and the Grail*, by Robin Jenkins (Edinburgh: Paul Harris, 1983) iii.
- ¹⁵ Manfred Malzahn, "'Yet at the start of every season hope springs up": Robin Jenkins's *The Thistle and the Grail* (1954)', *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996) 94.
- ¹⁶ Craig, Introduction v.
- ¹⁷ Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1963) 277.
- ¹⁸ Malzahn, 'The Industrial Novel' 237.
- ¹⁹ Burgess 410.
- ²⁰ Arguably, Rutherford can be read as a later version of David Sutherland, who has married the Kirstie he loves only to find that her social ambitions tear to pieces the very principles he wants to uphold.
- ²¹ Isobel Murray, "'Not So Simple Annals of the Poor": Robin Jenkins's Early Fiction', *Ideas and Production: Culture and Experience in the 1950s* IX-X (1989): 79.
- ²² Murray, 'Not So Simple' 80.
- ²³ Malzahn, 'Yet at the start of every season' 92.
- ²⁴ *ibid* 92.
- ²⁵ *ibid* 92.
- ²⁶ Hart 275.
- ²⁷ See Hart 275. Hart claims that the Sheriff and the policemen set out on their mission from Glasgow whereas in fact they leave from Edinburgh - although a minor detail, this suggests that Hart did a rather hurried reading of the novel.
- ²⁸ Alastair R. Thompson, 'Faith and Love: An Examination of Some Themes in the Novels of Robin Jenkins', *New Saltire* 3 (Spring 1962): 62.
- ²⁹ Personal Interview 18. Jenkins claims *The Missionaries* is one of those novels he nervously tiptoes away from.
- ³⁰ It is highly probable that Sollas as Iona is meant as a symbolic miniature of Scotland. After all, Iona is the one and only *holy island* of Scotland, and it is there where all the ancient Scottish monarchs are buried. If we read the novel in this way, the conflict that takes place between law and religion in the novel could be a reference to the bloody clash there occurred between the Covenanters and the government in Scotland during the Covenanting Wars.
- ³¹ Tom Steel, *The Life and Death of St. Kilda: The moving story of a vanished island community* (London: Harper Collins, 1994) 12.
- ³² In this powerful poem, Muir argues that the Reformation proved destructive for Scottish character, marking the end of a 'true' cultural identity in Scotland and the beginning of cultural disintegration.
- ³³ Robin Jenkins, interview, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', by Glenda Norquay, Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985, 439.
- ³⁴ Horst S. and Ingrid Daemmrich, *Themes and Motifs in Western Literature: A Handbook* (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1987) 67. The significance of clouds as signs of divine intervention is backed up with examples from the Bible such as when the cloud led the people of Israel in Exodus, and when it separated Christ from his disciples at his ascension.
- ³⁵ Personal Interview 16.

- ³⁶ In Greek myth, Jason was the leader of a group of young men who sailed on the *Argo* in search of the Golden Fleece, which was held by Aeetes of Colchis. Only with the help of Medea, daughter of Aeetes, did Jason obtain the fleece, and he sailed back to Greece with Medea as his wife. The story of Jason and Medea ends tragically; after Jason leaves Medea for another woman, Medea revenges herself upon him by murdering their two sons (an event dramatised in Euripides's *Medea*).
- ³⁷ William Righter, *Myth and Literature* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) 22.
- ³⁸ Margaret Dalziel, 'Myth in Modern English Literature'. *Myth and the Modern Imagination*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1967) 28.
- ³⁹ G. R. Manton, 'The Making of Myth'. *Myth and the Modern Imagination*, ed. Margaret Dalziel (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1967) 9.
- ⁴⁰ The narrative voice tells us that Andrew's campaign is directed against opinions 'held by every dignitary in Church, State, and Law' (*TM* 7). But it is also revealed that Andrew's father is a minister, and his uncle a lawyer and a sheriff, so that Andrew is clearly not only attacking the social authorities, but also speaking out against his own family. This aspect of *The Missionaries* is reminiscent of Stevenson's portrayal of Archibald Weir in *Weir of Hermiston* (1896), where Archie speaks out against capital punishment after seeing his father, Judge Hermiston, sentence a criminal to death. Andrew's defiance of the law and of the religious establishment therefore echoes Archie's challenge to his father's authority in Stevenson's novel, and Jenkins thus draws on themes of paternal and familial conflict that were recurrent in Stevenson's writing.
- ⁴¹ Apollonius of Rhodes, *The Voyage of Argo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 109.
- ⁴² *ibid* 145.
- ⁴³ Daemmrich 126-127.
- ⁴⁴ For example, Andrew reflects on the 'uncontrollable levity of women' (*TM* 16), and thinks that there is a 'connection between ... supreme beauty and female turpitude' (*TM* 22).
- ⁴⁵ In his use of Sollas island, Jenkins may in some ways be drawing on the influence of his favourite Scottish author, Robert Louis Stevenson. In choosing an island setting, Jenkins echoes Stevenson's frequent use of islands to explore central moral issues in his shorter fiction, such as *Treasure Island* (1882) and 'The Beach of Falesá' (1893). The isolated setting of the island is important; as a motif in literature, islands 'enable the individual to gain self-insight through introspection' (Daemmrich 147). This applies to both Stevenson's and Jenkins's use of islands, since their island plots frequently bring profound moral confrontations to the protagonist, as in the case of Wiltshire of 'The Beach of Falesá'. Thus, for Jenkins and Stevenson the island represents 'an environment outwith the confines of everyday existence', the perfect environment in which to explore their moral concerns (Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 101, referring to Stevenson's employment of the island in his shorter fiction). Admittedly, the island motif has been used frequently in English literature—as in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954)—but Jenkins's admiration for Stevenson's writing, and the two authors' similar concern with absolutist morality, means that Jenkins is likely to have been influenced by Stevenson in this respect.
- ⁴⁶ Thompson 58.

Chapter 4:

Moral Extremes: *The Cone-Gatherers* (1955)

The Cone-Gatherers is perhaps Jenkins's best known novel. It is on the surface a simple, fable-like story about the struggle between good and evil, and this, along with its conventional, clear-cut style and its poetic quality, is probably the reason for its success. The novel has been compared to John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1937)¹ and it has even been argued that Jenkins's novel is 'far more ambitious and profound' than Steinbeck's.² The novel's Biblical echoes have resulted in critics' suggestions that Calum and Duror represent good and evil, and that Calum's ultimate death at the hands of Duror is parallel to the crucifixion of Christ, causing Lady Runcie-Campbell's cathartic feelings at the end.³ *The Cone-Gatherers* is the one novel by Jenkins in which the binary opposites of good and evil are most unequivocally drawn, but while employing Biblical myth to highlight the novel's moral dimension, Jenkins also explores the ambiguous and paradoxical nature of humanity when faced with innocence and moral polarities. In addition, the Biblical element of the story is brought further into focus when one of the novel's central characters is trapped in a conflict between her Christianity and her rank. It is Lady Runcie-Campbell's reaction in the face of a horrible death that confuses most readers and has resulted in some critics' opinion that the novel, and especially its end, is flawed. Thus, for example, Douglas Gifford suggests that the novel insists on the 'transcendence at the expense of the realism',⁴ and Edwin Morgan asserts that the grim ending is 'only relieved by the *implausible* catharsis of Lady Runcie-Campbell' (italics mine).⁵ Indeed, the religious significance of the lady's final experience appears overstated, and yet it seems another manifestation of Jenkins's complicated and paradoxical relationship with religion, as well as possible indication of his moral trickery. The unconvincing conclusion thus arguably encapsulates two strands of the novelist's moral outlook, namely, his paradoxical and often naive quest for spiritual significance, on one hand, and his tendency to manipulate the reader's expectations and thereby suggest an underlying significance to extreme or 'implausible' circumstances, on the other.

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One of the central concerns of *The Cone-Gatherers* is the struggle between good and evil, which are, respectively, represented by Duror the gamekeeper and Calum the cone-gatherer, and Jenkins establishes this binary opposite through the two characters early in the narrative. This struggle has Biblical overtones, suggesting that Duror is the evil Satan lurking in the garden of Eden (the woods of the estate), while Calum represents the innocence corrupted by Satan in the Biblical story of the Fall. Duror's evil presence

gradually becomes more dangerous and more horrific, and this is realised through various aspects of the narrative. We become aware of the gamekeeper's obsession with the cone-gatherers at an early stage when Duror has been spying on the brothers in the wood, 'in an icy sweat of hatred, with his gun aimed all the time at the feeble-minded hunchback' (CG 17). Through Duror's perspective, we learn that he is tormented by the cone-gatherers' presence in the woods, and is particularly repulsed by Calum's deformity. Moreover, although details about the gamekeeper's unhappy family situation and his wife's sickness show him in some sympathetic light, Jenkins's portrayal of Duror in the context of the war and particularly the Holocaust clearly establishes a feeling of nightmarish evil:

He [Duror] had read that the Germans were putting idiots and cripples to death in gas chambers. Outwardly, as everybody expected, he condemned such barbarity; inwardly, thinking of idiocy and crippledness not as abstractions but as embodied in the crouch-backed cone-gatherer, he had profoundly approved. (CG 21-22)

Duror is highly significant to the novel's moral dimension, especially as epitomising the antithesis to an 'ideal' goodness as represented by Calum. Further, Duror clearly has a very prominent symbolical function in the novel. For example, it is hardly a coincidence that his name echoes so many words that are related to his situation: *endurance*, *ordure*, *duration* / *duress* (imprisonment), *duramen* (heartwood), *dour* (Scots for hard, stubborn, dull, gloomy, barren).⁶ Moreover, he is on several occasions likened to a tiger; Dr Matheson, Duror knows, cannot hear 'the snarling of the tiger' (CG 118), just as no one in the pub in Lendrick knows that inwardly Duror is 'prowling ..., sniffing ..., and snarling' (CG 133). All over there is the symbolism of imprisonment, filth, decay, and uncontrollable rage.

Connected with this is Jenkins's use of tree-symbolism, which reflects Duror's character and psychological situation throughout the novel, and emphasises another strand of Jenkins's fiction in which trees are accorded definite allegorical significance.⁷ An early scene relates how Duror 'could have named, item by item, leaf and fruit and branch, the overspreading tree of revulsion in him' (CG 18). As the novel progresses, this symbolism is intensified, even to the point that Duror feels 'his sap, poisoned, flowing out of him into the dark earth' (CG 119). And as the gamekeeper's ominous mental state becomes more obvious, other characters also start to associate him with decay and rot. Lady Runcie-Campbell's reflections on Duror's change demonstrate this clearly: '... now this sinister transformation in Duror, itself an episode from a macabre fairy-tale, suddenly in the wood the straight stalwart immaculate ash tree turning to a squat warty bush swarming with worms' (CG 180). Similarly, when old Graham sees a dead Chilli pine, 'with the ground beneath littered with its fragments, like ordure' (CG 209), this image of decay and filth is

linked to Duror in the following pages, since Graham feels as 'it was the rotting tree itself had moved' when Duror walks from under the pine (CG 215).

Duror's nightmare early in the narrative especially reflects Jenkins's poignant use of tree-symbolism in order to shed light on the gamekeeper's terrible mental state. Duror's wife, Peggy, paralysed, silly, and obese, is important to our perception of Duror's character, and her impact on his psychology is made clear in this scene. In his dream, Duror sees thousands of thrushes, 'with tremendous fluttering and chirping' (CG 81), flying out of a gean tree to attack Peggy who lies asleep in the garden. In the dream, he is unable to help her. Peggy represents the misery of Duror's life. When young and beautiful she made him happy, but this happiness lasted only two years, and now she is a simpering and wheedling monstrosity. For twenty years Duror has not had sexual intercourse with his wife, but despite this he has remained obstinately faithful to her. While he is clearly sexually frustrated, he has also gradually started to despise and abhor her presence, and therefore he, subconsciously, wishes that she was dead. The thrushes coming from the tree thus only represent that part of him which longs for a release, that part of him which would want to kill his own wife. Although Jenkins uses symbolism very effectively in other places to emphasise how Duror gradually becomes consumed with evil, this scene demonstrates the essence of Duror's frustration. The nightmare reflects how Duror is haunted by his own life, and emphasises that he is torn between the conventions and morals of society on one hand, and his longing for a release on the other. At this early stage, the narrative voice suggests the motivation behind Duror's hatred of Calum, which is then confirmed in Duror's realisation after the deer drive that 'this misbegotten creature [Calum] was ... [the] personification' of his own 'stunted, misshapen, obscene, and hideous' life (CG 92).

While Duror clearly symbolises evil in *The Cone-Gatherers*, his role in the novel is also relevant to the more universal moral message of the novel. Arguably, Duror is too consumed with evil to be a convincing character, and yet another possibility is that Duror is simply mad and therefore not responsible for his own actions. Even so, Jenkins's portrayal of Duror's degeneration is especially fitting when viewed in the context of the war that is taking place outwith the isolated setting of the woods. While reminding us of the Holocaust of World War II (of which Duror approves), Jenkins ensures that Duror's descent into evil escalates in his murder of the innocent Calum, making evident the parallel between Duror's crime and the atrocities being committed by the Nazis. Arguably, Duror not only symbolises evil in itself, but his moral decline is also meant to warn the reader about the evil inherent in the nature of humanity. To make this warning more effective Jenkins has to 'present a developing picture of a nightmarish insanity of evil that is in the end unquestioned'.⁸ The novelist's message is that the capacity for evil is a part of our

nature. Jenkins has commented that he has seen 'the fury and resentment below the surface ... in all of us',⁹ and this is reflected in Duror's own thoughts of evil as not 'dwelling only in certain men and women' but being instead 'a presence like air, infecting everyone' (*CG* 118). The human ability to commit unimaginable and heinous crimes is then epitomised by Duror's murder of Calum.

By contrast, the opposite extreme to Duror's evil is represented by Calum, the deformed hunchback with an angelic beauty of face, whose moral innocence establishes an ideal of goodness which other characters are aware of, but of which many feel deeply suspicious. Calum belongs to the group of characters in Jenkins's fiction who display an 'abnormal' goodness and moral awareness, and who are thereby set apart from the rest of their community. However, Calum is different from Jenkins's other 'holy fools' or moral innocents in that his goodness stems mainly from his mental handicap. Furthermore, through the negative reaction shown by Duror and Lady Runcie-Campbell to Calum's physical deformity, Jenkins ironically suggests that 'deformity' can be a more internal and hidden condition, as highlighted in Duror's psychological development. As a result, Calum operates on several different levels in the narrative—he epitomises goodness, yet is clearly portrayed as an outsider, his exterior disfigurement reflects ironically on the interior nature of other characters, and his ultimate role as a victim suggests, in Norquay's words, that his 'adherence to ideals, his potential for good, is shown through events to be self-destructive'.¹⁰ Jenkins's portrayal of this innocent is however very much defined by the fact that the reader is given limited access to Calum's thoughts through the course of the narrative. Therefore we perceive Calum more as a symbol than as a real human being, although episodes like the deer drive encourage us to empathise with the little cone-gatherer.

Importantly, Calum is in many ways presented as a Christ-like figure. For instance, when Lady Runcie-Campbell rather cuttingly remarks that Calum is unique, 'but remembered a moment after that the perfect exemplar of uniqueness was Christ Himself' (*CG* 64), an indirect analogy is made between Calum and Christ. While even Neil, normally so even-tempered and decent to others, takes part in the animosity directed towards the conscientious objectors in Ardmore against his better judgement, Calum is 'too honest, generous, and truly meek' (*CG* 111-112) to be able to take part in the exclusion of these men from the community. It follows that the inability of judging other people was one of the characteristics of Christ. The obvious result is that Calum's death at the end can be seen as symbolical, as a kind of crucifixion, where he hangs from a tree, his arms dangling in 'macabre gestures of supplication' (*CG* 222).¹¹ If the reader has previously associated Calum with Christ, then the ultimate tragedy further emphasises his Biblical

significance. This view is supported by Iain Crichton Smith, who sees Calum's body as 'almost crucified, like Christ's'.¹² In this context, it can be argued that Calum's death at the end is a symbolical sacrifice to atone for the sins of humanity.

Calum belongs to the group of sacrificed innocents within Jenkins's fiction on whom the novelist places specific, almost religious or ritual, emphasis. Tom Curdie of *The Changeling*, Sam McShelvie of *Guests of War*, Tommy Springburn of *A Toast to the Lord*, and Jenny of *The Expatriates* all seem to meet their death for a purpose. Within this context, Jenkins's paradoxical search for spiritual significance is highlighted, and although this is perhaps often realised somewhat unconvincingly, it is nevertheless important to the moral dimension of his fiction. Calum's symbolical function in *The Cone-Gatherers* is evident; he is 'a concrete manifestation of the possibility of innocence'¹³ on one level, and highlights 'the precept that the innocent must suffer, ... [becoming] almost sanctified by his death'¹⁴ on another. Even so, Smith's worry that Jenkins 'may be putting too much weight on Calum's death as a symbol for renewal as well as on the cones as a similar symbol'¹⁵ is a valid comment, and signifies perhaps the reason why many readers are uneasy about the novel's conclusion. Reader perplexity applies especially to Lady Runcie-Campbell's positive feelings when faced with Calum's brutal death. To examine this question further, it is necessary to look closer at the role of Lady Runcie-Campbell herself, especially within the novel's moral dimension.

Jenkins has been criticised for his 'unsatisfactory attempt to portray the too self-consciously snobbish Lady',¹⁶ and for 'novelettish touches'¹⁷ in his description of her, while an otherwise positive review comments that the novel's quality is 'marred by the central improbability of the great lady's inhumanly insolent behaviour'.¹⁸ But, despite being perhaps a caricatured version of the unfair and condescending aristocrat, Lady Runcie-Campbell is very important to the novel's moral concerns, since it is through her that Jenkins explores the conflict between Christian morality and social conditioning. Although the narrative voice makes it clear that Lady Runcie-Campbell has the potential to be humane, her Christian and moral beliefs are heavily compromised by her wish to adhere to the code of rank represented by her husband. Thus, while the lady's father 'had bequeathed to her a passion for justice ... and a determination to see right done, even at the expense of rank or pride' (CG 54), her husband, Sir Colin, is 'orthodox, instinctively preferring the way of a world that for many generations had allowed his family to enjoy position and wealth' (CG 54-55). As this example indicates, Jenkins's portrayal of the lady is early fraught with moral ambivalence, but as the novel progresses, the pressure of social rank becomes increasingly pertinent to Lady Runcie-Campbell's attitude and actions.

Through his portrayal of the lady, Jenkins also suggests the hypocrisy inherent in the gentry's notions of rank and order, and in this context his lasting interest in the discrepancy between Christianity and practice is emphasised. Although Lady Runcie-Campbell feels troubled about her treatment of the cone-gatherers, she realises that her moral scruples would not agree with her husband's ideology:

To obey Christ by being humble must mean to betray her husband, and also, perhaps, to amuse her equals. Sir Colin was franker, bolder, and more sincere than she: he believed in God, he said, and therefore in heaven; but it was a heaven where there must be rank as on earth. It was beyond even God's ingenuity to achieve an equality that would work. As his wife, and the cherisher of his title, she had to agree with him; but as ambitious Christian, and as her father's daughter, she could not help seeing how barren and impious was that argument. (CG 138-139)

But, like with so many of Jenkins's central characters, the lady's moral awareness is compromised, in this case by her wish to conform to the code of rank, and in this sense, Lady Runcie-Campbell does 'function as a representative of the victimising processes of historical and social conditioning'¹⁹ as argued by Norquay. Accordingly, she is, to an extent, a split personality. The Christian and the aristocrat in her are clearly at odds with each other through the best part of the narrative, and this is a paradox which anticipates the more complex and much more convincing character of Fergus Lamont. Alternating between regret at her condescension, on one hand, and contemptuous scorn towards the cone-gatherers, on the other, Lady Runcie-Campbell's place in the reader's sympathies is as a consequence highly precarious through the course of the narrative. It is also clear that her attitude becomes increasingly influenced by her aristocratic pride and snobbery, which fact reaches its climax in the beach hut scene, where she drives the brothers out into the pouring rain with haughtiness and contempt.

After her final decision to dismiss Neil and Calum from her estate, Lady Runcie-Campbell has more or less moved beyond the reader's sympathy. Although Jenkins's portrayal of her snobbery and pride is perhaps rather forced at this point, it nevertheless emphasises that side of the Lady that we are bound to dislike, implying that her 'Christian charity is limited mainly by snobbery'.²⁰ From this point on, the narrative perspective suggests that Lady Runcie-Campbell's Christian struggle is at an end. Jenkins's ironic use of simile as Tulloch has his last talk with her subtly indicates how far she has moved from her father's influence. She is pictured as a judge, seated on a chair that 'looked like a throne or judgment seat [*sic*]', and she looks like a 'goddess in disdainful contemplation of human frailties' (CG 189). As she gives permission for the cone-gatherers to stay until Saturday, she 'lifted her hand and let it fall (CG 190). Lady Runcie-Campbell has taken on her father's judgemental role but has abandoned the sense of justice that always influenced

him. She has accordingly given up in her fight against the biased, superficial, and morally corrupt level of society she belongs to.

Lady Runcie-Campbell's removal from moral and Christian principles is then further displayed when she blames the cone-gatherers for Roderick's danger, and assumes that the brothers will immediately run to his rescue when summoned by her. Without thinking once of previous events, nor of the fact that she has now dismissed them from her estate, she takes Neil and Calum for granted, as if they were her servants. At the same time, she decides to summon them with 'a sense of sacrifice' because she has, in her biased, parochial mind, already judged Calum guilty of Duror's filthy accusations. Like so many of Jenkins's central characters, she is unable to transcend the limits imposed on her by the constraints of hierarchy, and her failure is made all the more unpleasant by her assumption of aristocratic pride and vanity. Lady Runcie-Campbell therefore compares unfavourably with characters such as Charlie Forbes and Andrew Rutherford. While these two fail because they set too high moral standards for themselves, Lady Runcie-Campbell cannot reconcile the two value systems within which she operates. Jenkins suggests that the true components of Christian morality (compassion, forgiveness, charity, humility, and so on) are alien to aristocrats. Again, this idea is echoed in *Fergus Lamont*: in order to convince his aristocratic friends that he is one of them, Fergus behaves obnoxiously, showing no respect or compassion for his own people.

And yet the last episode of the novel somewhat deconstructs our negative feelings towards Lady Runcie-Campbell, while also adding to our feeling of uncertainty when it comes to evaluate her final moral significance and value. Here, it seems as if she has indeed been brought to a realisation of her faults, since, 'as she runs to ask for the cone-gatherers' help, she cannot 'make her anger against ... [them] grow'. She is unable to convince herself that she would be justified in 'hating and despising them' (CG 220), and 'fear, anxiety, love, sorrow, regret, and hope, ... [are] in her mind, but not anger' (CG 221). It looks as if the Lady has realised the folly of her ways, but it is however ironic that fear for her son brings about this self-confrontation. The tragedy that awaits her, and her reaction to it, then adds further to the ambiguity in Jenkins's portrayal of her. Calum is hanging dead from a tree, shot by Duror, his blood dripping to the ground. Why does she then, after hearing that her son is safe, feel, as she weeps kneeling on the ground, that 'pity, and purified hope, and joy, welled up in her heart' (CG 223)? Is Jenkins's aim to give the scene a symbolic significance, wherein the lady's former faults are redeemed through the sacrifice of an innocent, and is Hart thereby justified in his assertion that a 'weird, sacramental sacrifice engineered by a pathological perfectionist somehow brings hope of social justice grounded in sad humility'?²¹ Is Duror's murder of Calum and his subsequent

suicide a 'cathartic ritual act'?²² If we read the novel's conclusion in this way, Lady Runcie-Campbell's feelings must be religious, implying that the sacrifice of Calum has cleansed her spiritually. In this sense, Calum's death seems to have a positive, symbolic meaning.

In his discussion of *The Cone-Gatherers*, Gifford rightly points out that anyone who sees justification in Lady Runcie-Campbell's feelings in the end is 'piously ignoring the novel's overwhelming blood and pain'.²³ However, I would argue that Gifford's assertion that Jenkins ignores this blood and pain²⁴ does not perhaps take into account the implied analogy between Calum's death and the Crucifixion, which appears to account for the Lady's epiphany and transformation. Although I would agree that Jenkins's implication that Calum's death has brought atonement for the Lady is realistically unsatisfactory, the novelist is certainly aware that he is writing a tragedy here,²⁵ but a tragedy with catharsis, which means that the blood and pain is necessary to the outcome. Furthermore, Jenkins's search for spiritual significance is, despite his atheism, bizarrely and ambiguously revealed through his suggestion that Lady Runcie-Campbell's feelings are religiously uplifting. In spite of his sceptical perspective on religion, Jenkins shows a consistent hankering after spiritual meaning throughout his work, be it manifested in divine interference, as in *So Gaily Sings the Lark* (1950), *The Missionaries* (1957), and *A Toast to the Lord* (1972), or the sacrifice of innocents which brings a transcendence of sorts. What I have argued is Lady Runcie-Campbell's apparent catharsis, epiphany and transformation, given her through Calum's sacrifice, echoes and manifests the spiritual significance applied to deaths of innocents in Jenkins's other fiction.

On the other hand, the perplexing conclusion may derive from Jenkins's tendency to play moral tricks on his readers. While I would agree that the novel's conclusion is implausible and unsatisfactory, it could nevertheless be argued that Jenkins was well aware that the ending might provoke contradictory responses, and that the extreme and implausible situation is therefore simply a manifestation of his moral trickery. As readers, we are likely to either accept Calum's death as analogous with the Crucifixion and Lady Runcie-Campbell's feelings as a manifestation of this, or we will doubt the credibility of the Lady's reaction and thereby feel that the religious implications of Calum's death are overstated. This is then linked with our view of Lady Runcie-Campbell's earlier behaviour, since her reaction to Calum's death ultimately undermines or deconstructs our hopes regarding her true moral value. If Lady Runcie-Campbell has really come to regret her treatment of the cone-gatherers, and if she is after all really a good person, then she would surely feel her own part in the tragedy of Calum's death? Therefore it seems impossible to us that she would feel hope and joy in the face of a death she is partly to

blame for.²⁶ Seeing her run through the woods in a frenzy of fear and regret, we have perhaps hoped that the lady will in some way redeem herself morally on finding the con-gatherers. We are therefore disappointed in her reaction to the dreadful tragedy, this horrible revelation of human cruelty and misery, since this is something she would surely not feel if she was not simply a self-deluded hypocrite. She can, after all, not become what we hoped for, and thereby her strange and inappropriate sentiments emerge as a complex, but highly effective, piece of reduction, and arguably demonstrate Jenkins's tendency to play with his readers' hopes for affirmation.

Endnotes

- ¹ See Iain Crichton Smith, Introduction, *The Cone-Gatherers*, by Robin Jenkins (London: Penguin, 1980) 1; and Moira Burgess, 'Robin Jenkins: A Novelist of Scotland', *Library Review* vol. 22, no.8 (1970): 410.
- ² Smith, Introduction 1.
- ³ See, for example, Smith, Introduction; Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978); and Glenda Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins, and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985. These critics interpret the novel's conclusion as in some way redemptive or purifying for Lady Runcie-Campbell.
- ⁴ Douglas Gifford, "'God's Colossal Irony": Robin Jenkins and *Guests of War*', *Cencrastus* 24 (1986): 13.
- ⁵ Edwin Morgan, *Essays* (Cheadle Hulme: Carcanet, 1974) 244.
- ⁶ Duror is in some ways comparable to Mr Strone of *Love is a Fervent Fire*; both characters are strongly associated with trees (Duror and Strone both seek solace in trees, which they see as symbols of endurance, and other characters often perceive Duror and Strone as human 'trees'), both are sexually repressed due to their wife's illness, and both have names that reflect ironically on their character or situation.
- ⁷ In much of Jenkins's work trees are related to his central characters and their moral or psychological dilemmas. *So Gaily Sings the Lark* and *Love is a Fervent Fire* are based around forestry work and the latter novel simultaneously presents trees as central to the existence of the main characters. *The Holy Tree* places religious and ritual emphasis on a tree, which the novel's central native character Michael Eking sees as protective, but which, ironically, does eventually destroy him.
- ⁸ Isobel Murray, 'Robin Jenkins' Fiction', *Laverock* (1996): 35.
- ⁹ Robin Jenkins, The writer on writing, *The Cone-Gatherers*, by Robin Jenkins (Harlow: Longman, 1991) vi.
- ¹⁰ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 227.
- ¹¹ Images of the cross, crucifixion, and supplication are recurrent in Jenkins's fiction. In *The Missionaries*, both McInver and Nigg are found dead in a kneeling posture, as if they had been praying at the time of their death. Michael Eking is murdered under a tree in *The Holy Tree*, crucified, as it were, on his 'cross' (his holy tree). Despite his atheism, the eponymous protagonist of *Willie Hogg* finds a kind of reassurance in straightening a crooked cross on the church of his sister-in-law's mission in America after his wife's sudden death.
- ¹² Smith, Introduction 3.
- ¹³ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 231.
- ¹⁴ *ibid* 234.
- ¹⁵ Iain Crichton Smith, *Scotnotes: Robin Jenkins's The Cone-Gatherers* (Aberdeen: ASLS, 1995) 33.
- ¹⁶ Alastair R. Thompson, 'Faith and Love: An Examination of some themes in the novels of Robin Jenkins', *New Saltire* 3 (1963): 60.
- ¹⁷ Morgan 244.
- ¹⁸ 'Counterfeit and True', rev. of *The Cone-Gatherers*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 24 June 1955: 345.
- ¹⁹ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 231.
- ²⁰ Alexander Reid, 'The limits of Charity', *Scotland's Magazine* (October 1958): 44.
- ²¹ Hart 274.
- ²² Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (London: Macmillan, 1984) 453.
- ²³ Gifford, 'God's Colossal Irony' 13.
- ²⁴ *ibid* 13.
- ²⁵ See Personal Interview 19. Jenkins explained his 'going to extremes' with the ending of *The Cone-Gatherers* as inevitable, since the novel was a tragedy. However, Jenkins's interpretation of 'extremes' refers to the death of Calum and not the reaction of Lady Runcie-Campbell.
- ²⁶ See Reid, 'The limits of Charity' 44. Reid argues that the lady's pride and snobbery 'precipitate the tragedy'.

Chapter 5:

Escape, Sacrifice, and Redemption: *Guests of War* (1956)

As opposed to the more limited scope of *The Cone-Gatherers*, *Guests of War* presents a wide variety of characters whose lives are juxtaposed within the frame of the broader contradiction between country and city. Like so many others of Jenkins's stories, it deals with the move from urban to rural, using confrontations of class and environment to tackle highly complex moral and social issues. Moreover, and echoing similar narrative models in other novels like *So Gaily Sings the Lark* and *The Changeling*, patterns of escape, sacrifice, and redemption are established within the frame of the move from city to country, especially in the context of Bell McShelvie's longing for the countryside. Further, *Guests of War* can be classed among what Murray terms 'Jenkins's large scale novels', such as *The Thistle and the Grail*, *Dust on the Paw*, and *A Love of Innocence*, which are roughly classified by Murray as having two centres, 'one a character in some conflict with himself ... and the other a multiplicity of characters with an important link in common'.¹ The novel also reveals Jenkins's on-going concern with class distinction, emphasising the maiming effects of poverty on individuals whose society has left them no choice but endure conditions that defy human dignity and comfort. Again, Jenkins's moral considerations are prominent, both within the novel's social and human context, and this is highlighted in his ambitious and effective juxtaposition of numerous characters, their behaviour and reaction to each other, their social perspectives, and their moral understanding. Jenkins's portrayal of his characters is reflective of his central philosophy on the fallibility of human morality, emphasised especially in the development of Bell McShelvie. As always, Jenkins approaches his favourite moral topics with a great deal of irony. While *Guests of War* thus manifests Jenkins's interest in morality, it is also clearly Scottish in focus, made evident by Jenkins's use of dialect and by the novel's overtly Scottish setting.



Guests of War is a historical novel in the sense that it is based on real events in British history. Set in 1939 at the beginning of World War II, it describes the evacuation of hundreds of women and children from Glasgow to the countryside to safeguard them against the danger of German bombs. Jenkins's evacuees come from the slums of Gowburgh—a name almost certainly made up from parts of 'Glasgow' and 'Edinburgh'—and their retreat from the threat of war is Langrigg, mostly based, it seems, on the Borders town of Moffat, where Jenkins himself accompanied children from Strathclyde Primary School during the evacuations.² The event of evacuation provides Jenkins with the perfect

ground for exploring the effects of mixing together in a relatively small town the noisily cheerful, often vulgar, dispossessed slum dwellers of Gowburgh, and the well-to-do, 'respectable', middle-class people of Langrigg. *Guests of War* can on one level be seen as a 'social comedy',³ but the story also carries serious undercurrents within its commentary on social division, human morality and war. The importance of war is indicated already in the novel's title, *Guests of War* (my emphasis), and the specific historical reference to war provides a frame for the conflict between different lifestyles, attitudes, expectations, and social mores. War reverberates through the novel: the frequent references to war within the narrative, along with the repeated use of words and phrases that relate to warfare, emphasise its topicality in the story. Indeed, war becomes a symbol for the clash between the guests and the hosts of the story. Thus these two components of Scottish society, the Gowburgh dispossessed and the Langrigg privileged, are presented as virtually alien to each other, despite their common cultural heritage. In this way, Jenkins demonstrates the fractured nature of the Scottish nation and draws attention to the gaps which exist between social classes in Scotland.

Furthermore, the concept of war is highly significant to the development of Bell McShelvie, the novel's central figure, who is described in a review of 1956 as 'a memorable character, providing the needed stiffening for a more conventionally moulded subsidiary cast'.⁴ Bell welcomes the war as an opportunity to escape the slums of Gowburgh. Her sense of moral inadequacy, and her longing for escape, are central to the narrative. Bell is cited by Penny Clarke as a 'strong central character bringing continuity and control to potential chaos',⁵ Alastair Thompson presents her as 'that timeless figure of enduring strength and goodness',⁶ and a *TLS* review sees her as 'a treasure of good sense and tact'.⁷ Yet this is not how Bell perceives herself. Bell is pictured as 'dreaming of buttercupped meadows and green hills' at the beginning of the novel (*GOW* 7), which already suggests that she longs for an escape from the dreary surroundings of the Gowburgh slum. Her memories of an idyllic childhood in the countryside have never left her, and she sees the opportunity to go to Langrigg, even for a short time, as a return to this idyll, which would give her 'a glimpse and a breath to sustain her life for the next twenty [years]' (*GOW* 9-10). However, Bell's desperate wish to leave Gowburgh is frustrated by her family commitments and by her consciousness of these. Her feeling of guilt causes her to judge herself negatively, especially as her neighbour Meg Aitchison accuses her of 'running away' and of welcoming the war as providing her opportunity of desertion (*GOW* 11 and 13). Jenkins spells out Bell's predicament in a telling passage that stresses the importance of the war metaphor in relation to her situation:

Here indeed was her battlefield: the enemy she had to fight was despair at the ugliness shutting her in, at the inevitable coarseness and pitiable

savagery of many of the people shut in with her, and above all at her inability to keep her own family healthy, sweet, and intact. She was weary of fighting. Even soldiers in war were given relief. But Isaac was not well, though he had started work; he might soon die, and all the sooner if she forsook him. Flora, with her lipstick, dancing, tawdriness of mind, and resentment at having to work to help to bring up her brothers and sisters, might grow up to be little better than a prostitute; she needed, as Meg said, more control now rather than less. The battle was at its height, therefore, and she had made up her mind to desert. (*GOW* 11-12)

Bell is obviously one of Jenkins's many pilgrims—if not victims—of conscience. Her desire to reach beyond the reality of her own circumstance causes her enormous self-criticism, as she sees this as proof that she is traitor to her family and background. She admires and envies her neighbours' preference for 'the grime and racket of the city', seeing their acceptance of the 'gloomy streets' as their home as the source of their strength and their loyalty to their families (*GOW* 8). Her sense of disloyalty mixed with a feeling of failure and lost opportunities thus adds further to her moral predicament:

Yet with an inevitable heart-breaking disloyalty, she admitted, ... that the home of her dreams had been otherwise and far away; that the husband wished for had been tall, sunburnt, strong, smelling of hay and clover; and that the children of her imagination's womb had been without spectacles, without the pimples of poor nourishment and impure air, and without the twists of character enforced by the necessity to conform to a twisted society. Young lonely girls dreamed of perfection; it was up to the women they became to cherish the disappointments. (*GOW* 15-16)

Bell does not cherish her disappointments. Her intelligence prevents her; she understands the full scale and consequence of class segregation, and realises the injustice of society through her own suffering as an underprivileged slum-wife. It is precisely this realisation that forms part of Bell's inner conflict, since her ambitions for personal improvement originate in her acute social awareness. At the same time, Bell's perspective brings a critique of modern capitalist society, and the moral inconsistencies inherent in the social structuring of capitalism. Her perspective on the dirt, savagery, and squalor of the slums as compared with the spaciousness of the Scottish countryside emphasises the more unpleasant consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation, much in line with Jenkins's treatment of this issue in other novels, such as *The Changeling* and *The Thistle and the Grail*.

Despite Bell's continued self-criticism, and in spite of her frequent premonitions that she will be punished for her escape to Langrigg—hints throughout indicate that this will be realised in the death of her son, Sammy—Langrigg proves beneficial to her. Her stay in the country fills her with new hope, zest, and gaiety. Her role as caretaker at Cairnban confirms her ability as a leader. She becomes a more fulfilled, happier person. However, Bell's attitude to her Gowburgh neighbours begins to change, so that she

gradually becomes intolerant of their vulgarity and squalor. The first implication of her altered attitude is given through her husband's perspective, who is 'shocked to find her saying what she had often condemned Mrs. Aldersyde for saying' (*GOW* 243)—Mrs Aldersyde being notorious for her snobbery and contempt of her neighbours. And although the other Gowburgh women look up to Bell and choose her as their caretaker and leader, they are clearly aware of this change. After losing her patience with their squabbles, and calling them 'scruff' and 'beasts' (*GOW* 249 and 250), Bell has to acknowledge the change in herself: '... it was obvious that she must for some time have been acting towards them as if she thought them scruff. Perhaps, if she was to tell the truth, she had not altogether been unconscious of her attitude' (*GOW* 250). It seems that Bell's encounter with privileged life in Langrigg is the chief cause for her new arrogance. Further, when she visualises herself as the mistress of Mair-Wilson's estate, it becomes clear that she is now living in a fantasy. In this way, the narrative voice suggests that Bell's transformation may simply be based on self-deception, and thereby the true value and permanence of Langrigg's refreshing influence on her is questioned.

Bell is also defined through an outside narrative perspective that is focused on other characters' reaction to her. Bell's enormous sense of failure is best realised through her relationship with Edgar Roy, the young and handsome teacher from Gowburgh. The romance of Roy and Elizabeth Cargill in many ways emphasises Bell's own situation, both in terms of her underprivileged life, and in terms of the implied psychological and spiritual superiority that she has over her neighbours. Parallels and contrasts are made between Bell's own life and the future life of Roy and Elizabeth. Roy's perspective provides a glimpse of Bell's young days, suggesting that she must have been 'beautiful and exciting' before she had surrendered to 'voluntary incarceration in the prison-house of poverty-stricken marriage' (*GOW* 81-82). Roy is often deeply moved by Bell, and he perceives her appearance 'of natural superiority, of profundity, wisdom, and compassion, of intelligent endurance, and of that humour too deep for tears', as genuine (*GOW* 165-166). Above all, Bell sometimes reminds Roy of Elizabeth Cargill: 'the versatility and sheer feminine enigmaticness of her [Elizabeth's] smiles reminded him oddly of Mrs. McShelvie' (*GOW* 162). This 'astonishing resemblance' (*GOW* 163) suggests that, despite the two women's different stations in life, they carry some supreme qualities which set them apart from other people, and it could be argued that Elizabeth Cargill is everything Bell could possibly have become, given that she had been born into a privileged family. Nan Ross's words, as she warns Bell about the influence of Langrigg, indicate that this is how Bell is seen by other Gowburgh characters:

'You're superior to the rest of us in this hoose, Bell,' she said, 'aye, and in this toon. You should be here as the mistress, wi' jewelled rings on your

fingers ... You hae always been superior, even in Wallace Street yonder, standing at your close-mooth'. (*GOW* 244)

Roy's understanding of Bell, and his comparison of her with Elizabeth, unite with Bell's own reflections on her life to underline her feelings of personal failure. But Roy's admiration of Bell stands in sharp contrast to her envy and resentment towards him. The reason for her spite against the young teacher is simply that she sees in him, and in his relationship with Elizabeth Cargill, a manifestation of what she would have wished her own life to be. Initially, she sees him as her 'lost ideal of manhood' and envies him because he seems 'the embodiment of her betrayal of Isaac and her sons who, however lucky, would never grow up to be so tall, well-built, clever, self-confident, and able to shape the world to their needs' (*GOW* 16). This kind of comparison continues after Roy meets Elizabeth Cargill, but their romance only increases Bell's resentment. Measuring Roy's successes against her own disappointments causes her jealousy:

They [Roy and Elizabeth] stood hand-in-hand, ready to run together into life, which lay before them like a great scented meadow with sunlit hills beyond and a blue sky above; whereas she and Isaac had walked up the narrow smelly close to the room-and-kitchen in Wallace Street. (*GOW* 222)

Bell's feelings of envy add further to her self-accusation. In clinging to this 'perverse and shameful spite' Bell thinks that she has 'willingly placed herself under evil orders, and was now waiting, like an inspired hypocrite, to repay his [Roy's] help and kindness with treachery' (*GOW* 236).

Bell therefore constantly evaluates her own response to other people, and this often results in her harsh self-criticism. However, it is clear that Bell is setting impossibly high standards for herself, just as Andrew Rutherford in *The Thistle and the Grail* is too hard on himself in his attempts to gain the liking of his fellow townspeople. Murray holds the opinion that any 'moralist less stern than she [Bell] would be unlikely to blame her unkind impulses and be impressed rather by how seldom she yielded to them'.⁸ After all, Bell is only human and therefore fallible. Like Rutherford, her constant self-questioning is caused by her basic desire to be a good person and to be morally fair to other people. Certainly, the reader would not judge Bell as unkindly as she herself does, also in light of the fact that far more unpleasant characteristics are to be found in characters like Mrs Aldersyde, Gordon Aldersyde, and Councillor Michaelson, all of whom display these without the slightest hint of self-reproach. Bell's inner conflict and numerous self-accusations also make her more convincing as a character. Bell is a good person, despite all, and this is how she is viewed by an anonymous reviewer, whose otherwise negative assessment of the novel praises Jenkins's portrayal of Bell:

Mrs. McShelvie is the triumph and justification of *Guests of War* and Bell McShelvie would compel attention whatever the background and the circumstances ... Bell is a good woman in the plain and uncommon [*sic*] sense of that word, truthful, loyal, blessed with humour, humility and a natural authority which her neighbours acknowledge without jealousy, and Mr. Jenkins has performed the near miracle of making her credible.⁹

As hinted at throughout the narrative, Bell's development is brought to a resolution through her son's accidental death. Sammy's death has clear sacrificial overtones, especially as he is established as a 'symbol of pure good', becoming 'a focus of moral delight for the other characters'.¹⁰ Sammy certainly has a special place in his mother's affections, since his very existence has soothed her nostalgia for the countryside: 'As a substitute for those meadows and hills, Sammy all his twelve years had sufficed' (*GOW* 7). Sammy's death, suggests Jenkins, is Bell's 'punishment', necessary to Bell's gaining maturity and self-knowledge. Bell accepts this; she sees her son's death as just punishment for her desertion of her family, for her condescension towards her neighbours, and for her resentment against Roy. Her unequivocal acceptance is clearly revealed when she first hears of Sammy's accident, as it is clear to her neighbours in Cairnban that 'she had no hope; she was sure the boy was dead' (*GOW* 255). Even Bell's Gowburgh friends perceive Sammy's accident as a punishment for her arrogance towards them: '... they remembered her calling of them scruff and beasts. It occurred to them that Bell therefore stood in the shadow of some divine punishment, from which neither their forgiveness nor her own courage could save her' (*GOW* 255). Jenkins's approach suggests the possibility of divine retribution, which echoes the underlying suggestion in *So Gaily Sings the Lark* that Duncan Hamilton's death is God's vengeance for Hamilton's outspoken atheism. As in the former novel, Jenkins's presentation of this prospect is highly elusive, as is pointed out by Douglas Gifford: 'so, hints Jenkins, are we left with a ghost of a possibility of a providence which shapes existence'.¹¹

Bell's 'fatalistic acceptance' of her bereavement (*GOW* 261) is followed by her refusal to accept Langrigg/Gowburgh ideas of 'a splendid and cathartic funeral' for Sammy (*GOW* 265), choosing instead to bury him without the service of a minister and in the presence of a chosen few. However, the suggestion of one of the Cairnban women is likely to have an element of truth in it: that Bell's attempt to climb Brack Fell is in some ways for her the real burial of Sammy. But we also learn through Bell's perspective that her mountaineering venture means much more than just this, as it is an attempt to overcome her illusions along with the arrogance, resentment, and treachery they have caused, and so achieve the necessary determination to return to Gowburgh 'cleansed and unresentful, prepared to create as much light there as she could, not only for herself and her family, but for her neighbours' (*GOW* 282-283). Bell's 'ritual pilgrimage'¹² to Brack

Fell fails in the sense that she never reaches the summit, but this seems symbolic of the impossibility of rising above the reality of her Gowburgh existence. Her failure thus emphasises the illusion of her stay in Langrigg, where, in fact, she never had a real chance of becoming the mistress of Cairnban or of Mair-Wilson's estate, and therefore the need to turn back before gaining the top reflects the necessity to recognise the reality of her own life. As a result, Bell has to 'accept an unpretentious, naked, unillusioned existence', as argued by Gifford.¹³

This final self-confrontation also incorporates a change in Bell's disposition towards Gowburgh. The disappointment at not reaching the summit fades away against seeing Langrigg's peace and innocence, but above all its faith, 'simple and courageous as any bird's' (*GOW* 284-285). This is the moment when Bell accepts Gowburgh; as she returns from Brack Fell, she has decided to return to the city, having finally come to terms with the prospect of living there. She knows that she cannot see Gowburgh as peaceful, innocent, and full of faith, but because of this, 'because somehow of its vulnerability, it seemed to her even more dear' (*GOW* 285). Bell withdraws nothing of her condemnation of Gowburgh and its representing human greed, brutal indifference to beauty, and 'sordid confinement', but 'over it nevertheless she wished most profoundly to cast whatever protection her blessing offered' (*GOW* 285). Accepting that Langrigg's power of transfiguration is after all transitory and illusory, she now sees Gowburgh as her true source of strength:

The very stones whose age and grime she had so often condemned would, if she were to touch them with her hand, prove to have more sustenance for her spirit than these rocks on the unblemished hill. (*GOW* 285)

Bell's true personal revelation is thereby this positive acceptance of her life in Gowburgh, a recognition that is imperative to her survival: 'she no longer saw defeat or disappointment, but only a necessary resolution' (*GOW* 286). The novel ends with Bell walking back to Langrigg, tired but 'smiling, with the tears running down her cheeks' (*GOW* 286).

It seems therefore that Bell's moral pilgrimage is concluded on a positive note. Such is certainly the view taken by Thompson, who argues that the novel's resolution is marked by 'quiet, unrheterical but utterly Scottish moral passion and purity'.¹⁴ This has however been questioned by Clarke: 'the "necessary resolution" on which the novel ends does lack conviction, with the strong kind of unwillingness reflected in Bell's own ambivalent reaction of smiles and tears in the final sentence'.¹⁵ Clarke argues that a comparison can be made between Mrs Aldersyde's transitory humility earlier in the novel, and Bell's final resolution, which might, as in Mrs Aldersyde's case, 'as soon as tomorrow be forgotten' (*GOW* 219).¹⁶ True, Jenkins's central characters often fall short of their own

best intentions, as does Fergus Lamont who, after his stay in East Gerinish, considers himself cleansed of arrogance and condescension, only to display these very faults to his fellow travellers on his way back to Glasgow. Furthermore, Jenkins is prone to give his conclusions an air of ambiguity. Yet, at closer look it becomes obvious that Clarke's reading of Bell's resolution is superficial, as she does not take into account Bell's fierce moral sensibility, integrity, and strength of determination. Bell's ultimate resolve is undeniably real, and her tears at the end do not necessarily have to signify an unwillingness to stick by her decision, but must instead surely be related to her hitherto unreleased grief for Sammy. This view is supported by Gifford, who claims that Bell's tears are 'final release of grief for Sammy and reconciliation with Gowburgh, to which she now turns'.¹⁷ Murray also perceives the ending as positive, stating that 'Bell's quiet and unobtrusive return will be heroic and effective',¹⁸ while Beth Dickson praises the story's conclusion for being a 'strong statement of resolution, so uncommon in the Scottish novel'.¹⁹



While Jenkins uses war as metaphor for the Gowburgh exodus to Langrigg, and for Bell's inner struggle, the novel's actual reference to the war in Europe has a more universal relevance and provides a vital frame for the novel's moral considerations. Although the novel maintains an air of comedy throughout the chapters describing the evacuation and the billeting of the evacuees once in Langrigg, there is an undercurrent of a more serious nature that relates to the moral hypocrisies of international warfare. Early in the narrative, we see the first indication of Jenkins's approach through the perspective of Harold Scoullar, one of the teachers who accompany the evacuees to Langrigg. Scoullar reflects on the paradox of the many selfish and corrupt soldiers serving the 'morally righteous' British army in its fight against the evil represented by Hitler's Germany:

Right had to be served by wickedness as well as by virtue. That could be God's colossal irony of course, and as such deserved a sad smile of reverence; but it could also be the consequence of man's own hellish entanglement, which deserved the headshake and shiver of aversion. (*GOW* 27)

This subtly ironic passage suggests two things. First, God plays with human moral conceptions by arranging for morally corrupt people to fight against evil. Second, the use of wickedness to fight against Hitler is manifestation of humanity's propensity towards evil, since man's 'hellish entanglement' signifies the state of sin man has been in since the Fall. Thus Jenkins is posing a complex moral and theological question here: is human morality subject to the humour of God, or are we all ultimately suspect when it comes to our moral worth?

Edgar Roy is significant also in this context, as his role in the novel is clearly morally ambiguous. Gifford classifies Roy as 'a typical quixotic, idealistic Jenkins figure ... both emblem of Good and figure of satiric exposure of how even our finest types are alloyed'.²⁰ An idealist in line with Andrew Doig of *The Missionaries* and Charlie Forbes of *The Changeling*, Roy's true moral value is ultimately measured by his participation in the real war happening in Europe. Within her discussion of Roy and Bell as 'victims of their self-images',²¹ Norquay argues that Roy 'transmits the image of himself as a crusading hero', and 'assumes the mantle of romantic hero' through his alliance with Elizabeth Cargill.²² The symbolic words of Archie Campbellton certainly confirm the view of Roy as crusader while suggesting the precariousness of Roy's ideals, referring especially to material greed and moral fallibility:

'You are a young man, Edgar: belief in the perfectibility of your species becomes you; it is the Red Cross on your shield. Alas, swords plunged into the blatant beast of human nature break off in fragments until only the hilts are left. If not thrown away these turn into jewels, with which the crusader's souls are bought. Throw away that hilt in time, Edgar: face the world empty-handed; you still then may prevail.' (GOW 41)

But the narrative presentation of Roy as moral crusader is highly ironic. What Gifford terms as Roy's 'Galahad energy'²³ is superficial, because Roy is essentially fallible, like Bell McShelvie and like the rest of humanity. Roy goes to Langrigg and does Good on behalf of the evacuees, but he goes to Langrigg only because he is waiting to be called up for the British Air Force. It is especially in this context that the war in Europe is pivotal to Jenkins's treatment of human morality in the novel. Roy is the 'saviour' of the Gowburgh women and children; to them, he is a true Galahad. On the other hand, his future in the Air Force will cast him in an entirely different role, as he will bring death and misery to countless innocent German civilians. In this sense, Jenkins's use of the war reflects the paradoxical nature of Roy's moral significance. Gifford notes Jenkins's clever metaphorical use of war within the narrative frame and his more covert deployment of the real war to show up Roy's moral inconsistencies:

Subtly, Jenkins tricks us into forgetting the real war ... and the real killing of women and children and the bayonetting [*sic*] of men all over Europe. It's Jenkins's most effective trick, this, since only by making us think of Roy as future hero in some chivalrous conflict remote in the sky can he save up his best sleight-of-view: namely the relegation of Roy to lesser moral significance because his aggressive Good Fight for the evacuees will eventually be cancelled out by his future role as bringer of death from the skies to anonymous children.²⁴

*

Jenkins's presentation of moral absolutes in *Guests of War* is most overtly manifested in his portrayal of the good-hearted, simpleminded, gawky, bespectacled Sammy McShelvie,

considered by some to be soft in the head, on one hand, and of the small, sinister Councillor Michaelson, who secretly adores Hitler and his ideology, on the other. Like Calum of *The Cone-Gatherers*, Sammy represents an ideal goodness and the essence of moral innocence. Like Calum, also, Sammy has 'a more symbolic than real significance', as argued by Clarke,²⁵ and like many other moral innocents or 'holy fools' within Jenkins's fiction, Sammy's limited intelligence places him beyond the strictures of social conditioning, which means that his goodness is such as cannot normally be achieved in an adult world. Thus his simple-mindedness makes his goodness 'unrelated even to normal, ordinary common sense'.²⁶ The notion of Sammy being one of God's chosen is explicitly stated; his Langrigg hosts think he must be 'under the guardianship of a higher power than any government' (*GOW* 112), and when Roy suggests to Bell that her son is one of the elect, this is interpreted by Bell as signifying that Sammy will die young and foreshadows his later accidental death (*GOW* 38).

Sammy clearly functions as a sacrificial victim, his death open to interpretation as punishment for Bell's desertion of her family and for her arrogance and spite, while his sacrifice may also bring ultimate redemption to Bell as she reaches her final resolution on Brack Fell. This interpretation of Sammy's death is in line with other deaths of children or innocents in Jenkins's fiction, where it is implied that the death of an innocent is necessary to bring the plot to a moral or spiritual conclusion. These deaths have a major effect on a central character, while also functioning as a focal point for the narratives' conclusions. The death of Calum in *The Cone-Gatherers* may thus be a symbolical sacrifice to atone for the sins of humanity, while it is implied, however ambiguously or incongruously, that Tommy Springburn's death of exposure in *A Toast to the Lord* strengthens Agnes Tolmie's religious faith, thus giving her sufficient strength to endure and accept the tragedy that befalls her. Hart's argument supports the view of Sammy's death as one in a succession of sacrifices in Jenkins's fiction: 'once more the innocent is sacrificed to chasten the self-indulgent idyllicism of the supposed guardian'.²⁷

While Sammy is thus related to figures like Calum and Tommy Springburn, Councillor Michaelson is in many ways reminiscent of Duror, the symbol of evil in *The Cone-Gatherers*. Jenkins presents Michaelson's evil nature in highly symbolic terms. Described as small, simian-like, with 'hunched shoulders, bare wrinkled brown scalp, slightly pointed ears, and ... [a] grin of atavistic balefulness' (*GOW* 82-83), Michaelson's appearance seems more devilish or impish than human. Not surprisingly, therefore, Gifford argues that in 'the use of Christian motifs, he [Michaelson] is the devil of the book'.²⁸ We learn that he has contempt for all humanity, despises his own feebleness, and loathes his wife and daughters. There are two scenes in particular, though, where Jenkins

employs unusual and sinister symbols to reflect on Michaelson's character. Thus we see him 'stroking his moustache, as a boy might his dead pet mouse', with an expression of 'weary but satisfied malevolence' during the broadcasting of Britain's declaration of war on Germany (*GOW* 152), and after Sammy's death, Michaelson's gestures indicate that he relishes this opportunity to gloat over other people's misfortunes: 'Michaelson dabbed now at one side of his moustache and now at the other, with his knuckle: he was imitating the swing of the gravedigger's spade' (*GOW* 260). As with Duror, Jenkins uses strong and startling symbolism to emphasise the darker side of Michaelson's mentality. Comparable to Duror also, Jenkins uses Michaelson as a warning of the evil inherent in human nature. Significantly, we are told that his wife has at long last learned that 'in him, as in all humanity, was a dark hell where she and his children suffered for his sins' (*GOW* 152).

As we have seen, there is a clear set-up of binary opposites here, established through Jenkins's portrayal of the innocent Sammy and the sinisterly malignant Michaelson. Perhaps, also, the handsome, kilted, selfish, manipulative, and cruel Gordon Aldersyde, seen by Gifford as an embryonic form of the later Fergus Lamont,²⁹ could be viewed as another manifestation of evil in the story. However, Gordon's young age and the circumstances of his upbringing help us to view him in sympathetic light, especially as he seems innocent of Michaelson's charge of causing Sammy's death, as is implied through Gordon's own thoughts and further suggested in Bell's refusal to hold him responsible. On the other hand, other unpleasant characters, such as Gordon's mother, Mrs Aldersyde, are more difficult to define, since Jenkins's approach to these characters clearly emphasises their nasty sides while the sad ugliness of their own despair provokes some sympathy in the reader.



Guests of War is certainly one of Jenkins's finest achievements. It combines history, social and moral observation, comedy, and tragedy in an intricate and effective manner. It never loses narrative pace, nor is it overstated in its colourful portrayal of characters and setting. But, despite many positive critical treatments of this early novel, including Murray's argument that it compares favourably with and even 'effortlessly outclasses' Evelyn Waugh's *Put Out More Flags* (1942)³⁰, an anonymous review of 1956 suggests the exact opposite:

Evacuee invasions, as Mr. Evelyn Waugh proved, provide opportunities enough for the entwined elements of satire and farce, but Mr. Jenkins is content to pass them by. He misses the more obvious and, it must be confessed, the more entertaining opportunities his subject affords, and, indeed, the core of his purpose and his book would survive if the special train to Langrigg was cancelled and the 800 remained in their Gowburgh tenements.³¹

It is astonishing how anyone could be so entirely blind to the comedy of the evacuation to Langrigg, rendered with such vitality and gusto by Jenkins in this novel. The anonymous critic has clearly missed the whole point of the story if he thinks that the core of Jenkins's purpose would survive if the narrative took place wholly in Gowburgh. How, for example, would Bell possibly develop into the person she becomes without going to Langrigg in the first place? In what manner could Jenkins successfully play with the concept of war and make it a metaphor for narrative developments if it was not for the evacuation of the Gowburgh dispossessed to well-to-do Langrigg? How, indeed, could he play on the moral ambiguities of Edgar Roy without first taking him to Langrigg, there to play the chivalrous hero to the women of Cairnban and to his own Elizabeth Cargill? In short, if there was no special train to Langrigg, there would certainly be no such fine achievement by Jenkins as is *Guests of War*. *Guests of War* is central to the overall development of Jenkins's fiction, and its protagonist, Bell, is one of the most striking examples of Jenkins's recurrent pilgrims of conscience.

Endnotes

- ¹ Isabel Murray, Introduction, *Guests of War*, by Robin Jenkins (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988) xiv.
- ² See Murray, Introduction, ix. Murray quotes Jenkins in an unpublished interview: 'I *did* go with Strathclyde Primary School kids to Moffat, and quite a lot of the things that happen in the book did happen in real life. Pretty much as I describe it, too. It was hilarious!'. Also, Jenkins's description of Bell McShelvie's many country walks clearly suggests that Langrigg is based on Moffat. Thus Bell walks to 'the waterfall called the White Mare's Tail', a slight distortion of the actual waterfall of Grey Mare's Tail, situated up the Moffat Valley, few miles north-east of Moffat, and she walks to St Margaret's Loch, which, as St Mary's Loch, is also situated further up the same valley (*GOW* 246).
- ³ Murray, Introduction viii.
- ⁴ 'Home and Away', rev. of *Guests of War*, by Robin Jenkins, *Glasgow Herald* 2 August 1956: 3.
- ⁵ Penny Clarke, rev. of *Guests of War*, by Robin Jenkins, *Scottish Literary Journal* Supplement 30 (Spring 1989): 36.
- ⁶ Alastair R. Thompson, 'Faith and Love: An examination of some themes in the novels of Robin Jenkins', *New Satire* 3 (1963): 63.
- ⁷ 'Rival claims', rev. of *Guests of War*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 31 August 1956: 509.
- ⁸ Murray, Introduction xvii.
- ⁹ 'New Fiction', rev. of *Guests of War*, by Robin Jenkins, *The Times* 26 July 1956: 11.
- ¹⁰ Glenda Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins, and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985, 262.
- ¹¹ Douglas Gifford, "'God's Colossal Irony": Robin Jenkins and *Guests of War*', *Cenchrastus* 24 (1986): 16.
- ¹² Thompson 64.
- ¹³ Gifford, 'God's Colossal Irony' 16.
- ¹⁴ Thompson 64.
- ¹⁵ Clarke 37.
- ¹⁶ *ibid* 37.
- ¹⁷ Gifford, 'God's Colossal Irony' 16.
- ¹⁸ Murray, Introduction xviii.
- ¹⁹ Beth Dickson, 'Recent Fiction: Stuntedness and hard, cutting humour', *Books in Scotland* 29 (Winter 1988): 10.
- ²⁰ Gifford, 'God's Colossal Irony' 16.
- ²¹ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 259.
- ²² *ibid* 259.
- ²³ Gifford, 'God's Colossal Irony' 16.
- ²⁴ *ibid* 15.
- ²⁵ Clarke 36.
- ²⁶ Murray, Introduction xxi.
- ²⁷ Hart 275.
- ²⁸ Gifford, 'God's Colossal Irony' 16.
- ²⁹ *ibid* 16.
- ³⁰ See Isobel Murray, 'One Toe in Eden Still: Robin Jenkins's Fiction', *Scottish Review* 38 (1985): 93; and Murray, Introduction vii-ix.
- ³¹ 'New Fiction' 11.

Chapter 6:

Innocence Lost, Innocence Regained: *A Love of Innocence* (1963)¹

While *A Love of Innocence* is one of Jenkins's less known novels, it has a similarly wide scope of characters as does *Guests of War*, and likewise juxtaposes numerous sub-narratives within the broader frame of the move from urban to rural. This means that *A Love of Innocence* can be classified amongst Jenkins's more ambitious and larger-scale novels, as outlined by Isobel Murray,² and is perhaps what caused Hart's description of *A Love of Innocence* as 'a mature, post-war sequel to *Guests of War*'.³ Set in 1960, the novel tells the story of the adoption of two Glaswegian orphans, John and Tom Sneddon, to the island of Calisay.⁴ Jealous of his wife's continuous adultery, their father brutally murdered their mother with a hatchet three years previously and is now in a mental asylum for criminals. This central plot provides the basic framework for a complex tale of innocence, moral ambivalence, and redemption. The story of the boys' family background spreads quickly on the island and causes some unease and disruption amongst the islanders. The concept of innocence is central to the plot, while the novel fits within a group of Jenkins's early novels, including *So Gaily Sings the Lark* and *The Changeling*, which deals primarily with the transition from urban to rural, and charts the complications and transformations that take place as a result of this move. Various subplots within this basic storyline frame add further to the depth and complexity of *A Love of Innocence*. Jenkins presents a broad range of characters; there are frustrated spinsters, barren wives, religious bigots, and unhappy orphans, most of them reminiscent of similar types of characters in Jenkins's other work. Most important is the story of Angus McArthur, a dubious but fascinating rogue who lives on Calisay, and his affair with Margaret Mathieson, the Child Welfare Officer from Glasgow who accompanies the orphan brothers to their new island home. The development of Angus is central to the theme of moral pilgrimage in Jenkins's fiction, and his ambiguous moral value anticipates later Jenkins creations such as Mungo Niven of *A Very Scotch Affair* and the eponymous hero of *Fergus Lamont*.



The question of innocence is central to *A Love of Innocence*. Indeed, children are at the centre of the story, so that the whole book 'rings of children and sings with their laughter', as argued in a review of 1963.⁵ But, as this review also suggests, there is a dark, disturbing side to the experience of children in the novel,⁶ and it is in this context where the ironic significance of the title becomes evident, because the ultimate question posed is to what extent people will cherish and love the kind of innocence that children represent,

when the children in their care are of deprived, dubious, and even criminal parentage. The various reactions of the Calisay inhabitants to John and Tom Sneddon encapsulate this aspect of the narrative clearly. The secret of the Sneddon's background serves to test the limits of the various characters' sympathy, and the reception of the brothers demonstrates that their adoption to Calisay is, indeed, an 'experiment in love and faith' (*LOI* 76).

Jenkins's introduction of the Biblical concept of the sins of the father, as well as the narrative preoccupation with heredity, gives a further dimension, religious as well as scientific, to the question of innocence. There are characters, such as Helen Montgomerie, spinsterish matron of the Home, and Donald McArthur, the boys prospective foster father, who believe the sins of the father will be visited upon his children, and therefore that the Sneddon brothers will suffer for their father's crime. Furthermore, the islanders' Free Kirk mentality represents a rigid, even cruel, perspective on morality and sin. This is revealed in the words of an island woman who thinks it essential that Mary McArthur find out the true family background of the Sneddon boys before adopting them. This, Morag argues, is because the boys' real origin will be reflected in their character. Referring to 'the good book' to back up her argument, she says: 'What is bred in the bone cannot be got rid of; what is in the blood must speak' (*LOI* 46). While thus linking scriptural ideology with scientific ideas that argue for the genetic transmission of mental characteristics, the novel consistently questions the moral value of such ideologies. Again, the novel's title reflects ironically on this issue: if we believe in Biblical concepts such as the sins of the fathers, can we genuinely and wholeheartedly love and cherish the 'innocence' of children who are in any case likely to be morally tainted by past generations' wrongdoings?

Even so, there is some ambiguity in the context of the Sneddon's innocence, as it is implicitly suggested that the boys may in some obscure way be tainted by their father's crime. This suggestion moreover carries overtones of the Biblical idea of original sin. Elspeth McDonald, unaware of the boys' history, feels apprehensive about their stay on the island, sensing menace in 'their smallness, their dependence, their very sweetness' (*LOI* 102). Similarly, it is implied that Donald McArthur feels nervous and uneasy about the boys he has taken into his care (*LOI* 61, 85 and 213), and Janet Lindsay thinks that the brothers 'seemed to lie under some kind of guilt' (*LOI* 107). Does this guilt derive from their father's crime and thus confirm that his sins are indeed visited upon his children, or is it simply manifestation of all humanity's essentially sinful nature? And if we are all born sinners, can anyone at all be classified as innocent? Jenkins's fiction consistently poses such complex theological and philosophical questions, interrogating basic concepts of the Christian religion as well as the moral state of humanity.

As often in Jenkins's fiction, the final resolution to the central story of the Sneddons carries sacrificial overtones, although here this does not involve the death of an innocent. The first thing to consider is the symbolic meaning of Orsay,⁷ where John Sneddon is eventually hit by the memory of his father's brutal murder of his mother. Orsay is significant to the element of martyrdom in the story. Significantly, the island is linked with the birth of Christianity in Scotland, since, according to the novel, this is where St Columba landed before he continued on his journey to Iona, and where the Orsay priory was later built in Columba's memory. Jenkins's use of Orsay is clearly symbolic; the island used to be a sanctuary for criminals who, if they kissed the cross standing by the shore, would not be harmed while remaining on the island: 'After a year on it all their crimes, even murder, had to be forgiven' (*LOI* 229). For John and Tom Sneddon, Orsay signifies absolution and, consequently, the restoration of their innocence. Orsay thus figures as a defining point both within the story of the secret of the Sneddons and within the overtones of sacrifice and martyrdom in John Sneddon's story.

During the excursion to Orsay, John sees a holidaying couple sunbathing, the man trying to keep the clegs off his wife with a piece of bracken. The vision brings memory: the boy experiences the terrifying crime again, the father raising the hatchet over the mother's head. On one level, John's shock is necessary to bring the Sneddon story to a conclusion; the secret is out, the community of Calisay is shocked but generally supportive of the brothers, and John must now live with his knowledge for the rest of his life. On another level, John becomes the sacrificial victim who suffers for the sins of humanity. There are various aspects of the narrative which suggest this interpretation. Relatively early in the story, John is linked to Christ and martyrdom in Janet Lindsay's reflections on his posture in a picture of the orphans in the Glasgow Home:

There was John, standing peculiarly straight; no other boy held himself so stiffly. Why did he? Somehow she was reminded of the Celtic cross in the field in front of the mined priory on Orsay; perhaps because it was so erect in contrast with so many other stones there flat or leaning, and perhaps, too, because on it was sculptured the crucified Christ. (*LOI* 149)

Orsay is the defining link between John and the idea of martyrdom, and this is further revealed after the incident on Orsay. Angus's reflections are important here, since he sees a connection between the ghost of St Columba and John's stricken appearance: 'Had the saint's ghost appeared, then its face could not have been more remote than this small pale one, with the teeth chattering, and the head shaking, as if to deny what was still in the haunted eyes' (*LOI* 251). As Angus prepares to take John back to Calisay, this idea is further established: 'As Angus lifted the boy it was almost a surprise to himself not to see falling from his arms the white folds of the saint's robe' (*LOI* 254). John's suffering is

thereby presented as a kind of sacrifice to atone for his father's crime and, perhaps, to absolve those people on Calisay who have seen the Sneddon family background as a threat to the community. This possibility is echoed in the words of Donald McArthur: 'The bairn has been asked to suffer, for my sake' (*LOI* 291), while Angus's reply suggests that the boy's martyrdom carries a more universal significance: "'For all our sakes, Donald," he said cautiously' (*LOI* 291).

It is, however, ambiguous whether Angus's vision of the saint and the intimations of John's martyrdom are meant to be taken at face value, or whether they are ironic reflections on religious ideology and its dubious relevance to human life. This kind of ambivalence is felt throughout Jenkins's fiction, as for instance in his portrayal of Donald McInver, the leader of the religious sect in *The Missionaries*, and in the enigmatic motivations of the atheistic eponymous hero of *Willie Hogg*, when he straightens an iron cross on his sister-in-law's missionary church in Arizona. Despite his professed atheism, Jenkins recurrently imposes Christian significance and religious analogies in his fiction, and the possibility of there being a spiritual dimension to his characters' actions, or to the influences that shape their lives, is always present, though never entirely affirmed. Arguably, the ambiguity in Jenkins's deployment of religious symbolism reflects the author's own relationship with Christianity. On one hand, his Calvinist heritage has influenced him so strongly that it is impossible for it not to be shown in his writing.⁸ On the other hand, Jenkins is an atheist and dislikes established religion. This paradox is clearly felt in Jenkins's fiction; his narratives constantly indulge Christianity while simultaneously contravening its relevance to humanity.

Jenkins's questioning of religion in *A Love of Innocence* is best revealed in the portrayal of Donald McArthur, a seaman who is religious and fond of reading the Bible, and is early described as having 'a streak of the timid old conventional wife' (*LOI* 61). Thus Jenkins early hints that Donald is somewhat of a religious zealot. But it is only when his wife Mary is forced to reveal the secret of the Sneddons that this idea is emphasised. Arguing that he would be acting against God's purpose by sheltering the Sneddon boys, since God's purpose is to 'punish the wicked' (*LOI* 213), Donald now demonstrates bigotry and narrow-mindedness akin to other characters in Jenkins's fiction such as William Tolmie in *A Toast to the Lord* and Fergus's grandfather in *Fergus Lamont*. On God's orders, Donald argues, his decision must be to send John and Tom back to the Orphans' Home in Glasgow. His bigotry is evident when the schoolmistress, Jessie Ogilvie, discusses the forthcoming excursion with Calisay's children over to Orsay. In this scene, Jenkins emphasises Donald's narrow vision through Jessie Ogilvie's common-sense

perspective, clearly showing that Donald adheres to an old-fashioned, Calvinist, Free Kirk creed:

‘It’s not *my* picnic, Donald. It’s the children’s. Whoever wants can come. Are you for coming yourself?’

‘My days of picnic are past, Jessie. The minister and his wife will be there?’

‘I think so.’

‘He’ll see to it, of course, that you’ll not be having the games and races in the priory held itself [*sic*], where the Cross is.’

‘That’s the best place, Donald. I see no reason why we shouldn’t have them there.’

‘But it’s a sacred place, Jessie. Is not the Cross holy?’

‘I suppose it is, but sheep rub their rumps against it every day. I don’t think the children’s games will desecrate it ...’

[...]

‘That is true, Jessie,’ he said placidly. ‘But still, it is a sacred place surely; it would be wrong to turn it into a playground ...’ He placed his hand on the Bible.

No man’s horizons, she thought, had shrunk more than his. Yet his eyes were wrinkled with staring at great sky and sea distances. (LOI 225)

Like Agnes Tolmie in *A Toast to the Lord*, Donald is convinced that God speaks to him, that he is chosen by God to carry out the necessary punishment of John and Tom Sneddon. Therefore there is clear reference to Calvinist notions of the Elect in Jenkins’s portrayal of Donald. Moreover, Donald believes that two innocent children should suffer for their father’s crime. On trying to prevent the boys from joining the excursion to Orsay, he speaks of the ‘storm of God’s anger’ (LOI 235) and of the fifth commandment to ‘honour thy father and thy mother’ (LOI 236). He believes the boys represent sinfulness and evil, despite being only victims of their parents’ unfortunate and sordid circumstances. Donald thinks that by going to Orsay the Sneddons will desecrate the holiness of the priory and its ancient cross. The impending wrath of God is a fact within his religious ideology. Jenkins’s presentation of Donald’s dogmatism avoids any overt criticism of this ideology, but John Sneddon’s thoughts during Donald’s religious ranting carry a hint that Donald is a religious fanatic, and that his fanaticism verges on madness. Here, Jenkins uses a simple, child-like perspective on Donald’s behaviour as a camouflage for his critical approach to religious bigotry:

It occurred to Johnny that perhaps Mr McArthur was drunk. Other men on the island got a little bit drunk on Saturday nights ... They went home singing. Uncle Angus had once or twice called in on his way to his own cottage; he had been at the hotel, and had sounded drunk. But Mr McArthur drank only tea. Besides, how could he go out in his boat that afternoon if he was drunk?

Perhaps he wasn’t drunk; perhaps he was ill; which was why Mrs McArthur looked so worried. (LOI 235-236)

Despite this, there is some ambivalence in Jenkins's portrayal of Donald. Thus we may condemn him for his heartless decision to send the Sneddon brothers back to Glasgow, but we are equally ready to rejoice when he changes his mind, although he argues that this decision is based on an intimate exchange with God himself, which might cause some religious sceptics to doubt his truthfulness. That Donald changes his mind on the same day as John Sneddon is finally struck by the memory of the terrible tragedy must carry an underlying meaning. Is it perhaps a Jenkins's suggestion of the arbitrary ways in which God operates? This possibility is voiced in the thoughts of Angus McArthur, directed towards Donald after he tells Angus that he has made his peace with the Lord, on his boat under the sea cliffs, and that therefore he will keep the Sneddon boys under his protection:

[Under the cliffs] was, of course, dangerous for a man alone in a boat, with the swell rising twenty feet at least up the great whitened walls, and where all that ordinary ears could hear at any time was the screaming of hundreds of thousands of birds. Well, it was as convenient a place as any to listen to Christ telling you to do what your brother and wife and daughter had already told you you ought to do. Still, Donald, while He was telling you that, in one of the magnificent corners of his creation, in another He was terrifying innocence with a vision of evil. (LOI 290)

The benevolence of God is manifested in one incident, while His merciless power of retribution is confirmed in the other. Angus's ironic perspective suggests that God's actions are random and unpredictable. At the same time, the genuineness of Donald's exchange with God is never entirely repudiated; even Angus, despite his scepticism, cannot state with certainty that Donald is merely deluded.

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A Love of Innocence is not only a tale of innocence restored through 'sacrifice' and of religious bigotry, but also a sophisticated, fascinating study of one of Jenkins's most interesting and complex protagonists. Angus McArthur precedes many of Jenkins's later memorable creations, in particular Mungo Niven of *A Very Scotch Affair* and the eponymous hero of *Fergus Lamont*, although he differs from those two in having a peculiar self-mockery and self-understanding that they do not possess. Living in his cottage on Calisay, Angus is a retired chief deckhand of a boat that shipped cargo between Glasgow and the Isles. Now in his early fifties, he is living comfortably off the money inherited from a woman he was married to in Glasgow. While Angus's distinguished looks and bearing of superiority make tourists believe he is the local laird, the narrative early reveals that he is looked on with suspicion by the people in his community, many of whom see him as a fraud and as a manifestation of evil. Angus is indifferent and aloof, but he is also endowed with unusual intelligence and is highly unconventional in manner when compared with the other islanders. These aspects of his character seem to be part of the reason why the community views him with distrust and suspicion.

Angus is an extremely paradoxical character, as indicated by Hart's description of him as 'cynical raisonneur, but compassionate moralist'.⁹ Angus professes genuine insight into the human character, while also perceiving himself as God-like in his superiority over other people, harbouring contempt for their ordinary and banal everyday squabbles.¹⁰ Angus wants to preserve his 'male pride' (*LOI* 184) in his many deceitful relationships with women, and yet he slyly seeks to use these women's financial resources for his own benefit. He is an idealist who despises narrow-mindedness and religious bigotry, yet does at times seem fiercely traditional and even superstitious in his outlook. He is sceptical about religion, yet attends church regularly and with enthusiasm, and places specific emotional and spiritual significance on the Bible he inherited from his mother. At first sight, Angus is not a likeable character, especially as his desire to secure Margaret Mathieson's affections is so blatantly a part of his scheme to marry her for money. However, as the narrative progresses, we come to a better understanding of his complexities and a more positive view of his personality, while Angus himself is gradually driven towards a new knowledge of himself and the people closest to him. In this sense, Angus has a place among the moral pilgrims in Jenkins's fiction.

Angus's thoughts during his acquaintance and affair with Margaret Mathieson show that he is indeed manipulative, deceitful, even ruthless, in his dealings with women. He puts on a show of gallantry and charm to flatter the big and manly Margaret, who has never had any luck with men and whose frustrated sexual energy at forty is unleashed in a most comical, but touching manner during her first encounters with Angus. Angus's sexist thoughts imply the nature of his motives, for his seductions of women are not conducted for the sake of sexual pleasure—he sees sex more as burden than pleasure—but for the sake of money. Already a bigamist, Angus pursues Margaret in order to marry her and gain possession of her money. Beneath his exterior of charm and affection, he laughs at Margaret, sees her as an economical object and his thoughts of her are laced with sexist contempt for her physical clumsiness and her unquestioning adoration for him. Consumed by notions of superiority, he thinks of his love-making with Margaret as the mating of a god with a mortal, and her submissiveness further reinforces his conceit. Angus clearly holds the view that the man should be the ruling partner in a sexual liaison, and fears the possibility of the tables being turned on him in this respect. All these aspects of Angus's mentality are conveyed in the following passages:

He could hardly keep from laughing as he noticed how ravenous for it she still was after two nights and a Sabbath, and yet how gratefully submissive too. ... there had been that look of fidelity and appeal that had reminded him ... of Roy, Donald's dog ... If he asked her to, she would for the sake of receiving his love go down on all fours. In such ludicrous acquiescence there was also an element of pathos, perhaps. Well, as he had often enough

warned himself, there were bound to be discrepancies when a god mated with a mortal. [...]

With Margaret, the huge crawler and whiner, ... he was gloriously the god. Yes, now; but in a month or two's time would she not be displaying that female arrogance of the bed with which all women, whatever their size, were born? And by Jupiter, with her bulk and strength she could be really formidable. What, too, in the name of God Almighty, if she fell pregnant, as she was so obviously set on? There was always Australia, of course, and it would be but just if his flight were to be financed with her money. (*LOI* 143 and 144)

By presenting Angus as sexist, manipulative, scheming, and fraudulent in his dealings with women, Jenkins makes us aware of the many flaws of this character. We are therefore prompted to make a negative assessment of Angus's moral value. In addition to his treatment of women, Angus's selfishness speaks for itself; he readily accepts and likes other people's kindness and favours while secretly harbouring contempt for their human ordinariness. His interest in the Sneddons' history, and the fact that he more or less forces Mary McArthur to reveal this history to her husband, result in him being an agent to Donald McArthur's decision to send the boys away, and in this sense Angus can also be interpreted as representing evil as his influence seriously threatens the continuing happiness and security of the Sneddons on Calisay.

However, as the story progresses, we gradually begin to perceive Angus as a rather likeable rogue. People on Calisay maintain that Angus never showed any regard for other people, even as a child, but we learn that this is not true. Angus remembers the time of his boyhood when his sister-in-law's brother was killed, and how he had gone to the graveyard after the funeral and wept in sympathy for her. But Angus does not show his compassion to anyone. The narrative thus implies that a great deal of Angus's supposed badness derives from the gossip of neighbours and the community's misunderstanding of his isolated detachment. Perhaps, it is implied, Angus's self-imposed absence from human everyday reality is his own peculiar way of protecting himself from becoming emotionally attached to people. Despite this, Angus eventually has to accept that he loves his native island more than he has ever admitted to himself.

Paradoxically, further evidence of Angus's softer side is revealed through his relationships with women. The second part of the novel finds Angus's attitude and feelings towards Margaret greatly changed, while he also discovers that his feelings for Jessie Ogilvie, the hostile schoolmistress, are deeper than he ever realised. Angus eventually has to admit to a certain fondness for Margaret, and this change in attitude applies especially after she becomes convinced that she is carrying Angus's child. At first, the possibility of a child has negative meaning to Angus: 'To marry her and father the brat would ... mean the end of his defiant aloofness from the despicable squabble of human

existence' (*LOI* 183). Angus perceives his detachment from ordinary everyday life as proof of his superiority, but at the same time he does not realise that his 'defiant aloofness' means that he is an outcast, excluded from ordinary human affairs, and essentially alone. Towards the end of the narrative, however, Angus gains a new understanding of what his detachment really means, and it is here that the possibility of a child becomes a positive thing. During a central exchange with Jessie Ogilvie, who here makes a semi-proposal to Angus after formerly expressing her dislike of him at every opportunity, Angus thinks of the most sincere answer he could give her (although his real answer is different):

He could not say: 'But, Jessie, she says she's pregnant ... [and] somehow I like the thought, Jessie; I like it enough almost to marry the woman. Maybe it's because I've discovered I'm alone too, and the only bridge across which I could step among humanity would be a child of my own.' (*LOI* 250)

A child would give Angus a place among other people, as it would bring him down to human level through being the living proof of his basic humanity. This is one reason why Angus has softened towards Margaret, but 'her transfiguration into loveliness, through her love for him' (*LOI* 250) has also caused this change.

Ultimately, doubting that even his own child and possible domesticity with Margaret on his beloved island will change or satisfy him for long, and failing in his (drunken) attempt at reconciliation with Jessie Ogilvie, Angus regrets not being able to make happy and fulfilled the lives of the two women he is fond of. Having decided to leave Calisay forever and try his luck in Australia, Angus feels guilty at abandoning Margaret and his unborn child, but is comforted at the thought that she will get over him quickly once she knows 'what a scoundrel she just avoided marrying' (*LOI* 315). More importantly, Angus begins to realise the basic incongruity between his willingness to use people's kindness and generosity, and his contempt for human nature. Thus he starts to feel that it 'might not always be possible...to make use of fidelity, trust and generosity, and at the same time preserve one's contempt for the creatures so prodigal of them' (*LOI* 186).

Angus's ultimate self-confrontation derives from his gradual realisation that he is essentially and permanently alone. This is the most central aspect of his development towards self-knowledge. In the end, he realises that his aloofness means exclusion, but he now feels unsure whether this is what he wants:

Keeping humanity at a distance had more than one consequence; no doubt he had preserved himself from contamination, but he had also been deprived of what up to now he had thought well worth doing without, a sense of involvement, not in humanity's joys—these he had had in plenty—but in its sorrows and dangers. He was still by no means sure he wanted even a taste of these; yet as he watched the two little boys [Tom Sneddon and Douglas Munro] ... he felt a flicker of uneasiness at not being involved, however slightly, in their fates. (*LOI* 313)

What Jenkins appropriately terms ‘the inescapability from self’ (*LOI* 314) means that Angus will not be able to change despite his temporary regret at being what he is, and no matter how strong his uneasiness at being excluded, he will still remain isolated and detached from normal human experience. This is Angus’s final realisation during his last visit to his parents’ grave before leaving Calisay forever.¹¹ Sitting by the grave, he talks to the dead of his immorality, his selfishness, and his inability to change—in other words, acknowledging that he is incapable of escaping his own self:

But none of them, not even his mother, answered. They were not there. He was alone, with insects, slabs of stone, flowers and grass. A stonecat chirped and bobbed for an instant, a sheep bleated, a boy shouted. It made no difference. He was still alone. He always had been, and always would be; the hands that had helped him from the womb had not touched him, and the hands that would lift him into his coffin wouldn’t touch him, either. (*LOI* 315)

As with Rutherford in *The Thistle and the Grail*, Angus acknowledges and accepts his loneliness in the graveyard, but the scene in *A Love of Innocence* is markedly different from that of the earlier novel. Whereas Rutherford’s final vision is universal in that he perceives loneliness as being an inescapable part of the human condition, Angus’s final recognition applies only to himself. Rutherford’s acknowledgement that everyone is finally alone in this world is positive because it makes him accept his limitations and therefore allows him to approach life differently than before. Conversely, Angus’s realisation does not signify a fresh start, but rather strengthens his determination to leave Calisay and try his luck with wealthy and gullible middle-aged women in Australia. For Angus, there is no final redemption, only a sad resoluteness to stick to what he is, however morally suspect this ultimately makes him. At the same time, we feel sympathy for Angus as he makes his final exit from the story. Through the eyes of Flora, his niece, who is deeply touched by his farewell present, we see him as an old and unhappy man: ‘She was now almost in tears. It had struck her he was old, twice her age anyway, and his eyes were bloodshot and unhappy’ (*LOI* 317). And the last we see of Angus is him waving back at Flora, seated ‘like a Viking in his boat, but very lonely’ (*LOI* 319).

Despite the centrality of the Sneddons’ story within the narrative, then, Angus’s development is clearly of primary importance in *A Love of Innocence*. Angus is also one of Jenkins’s more interesting protagonists; although he is in some ways the only true villain in the story, he is also ultimately its only tragic hero. The presentation of Angus proves that Jenkins seldom draws clear lines between the moral binaries of good and bad, or right and wrong. Jenkins does not present his characters or story-lines in black and white, but rather in different shades of grey, changing constantly according to the

ambiguous and ironic approaches taken to central themes in the text. Angus may be black-hearted, manipulative, deceitful, conceited, contemptuous, and sexist, but he is also much more than this: he is a spokesperson within the narrative for various central ideas of Jenkins's overall philosophy, and he ultimately reveals the better side of himself while reaching a greater, more compassionate understanding of the people of Calisay and of his own isolation. Indeed, Angus has been cited by Francis Hart, the first major critic of Scottish literature to note the importance and complexity of Jenkins's writing, as 'one of Jenkins's most interesting characters'.¹² Also, not surprisingly, an anonymous critic describes Angus as 'among the most complex characters of modern fiction'.¹³

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A Love of Innocence is among the more sophisticated of Jenkins's early Scottish novels in terms of its multiple and complex plot developments and its variety of perspectives, and it deserves pride of place in any comprehensive study of Jenkins's work. Even so, this ambivalent novel has been more or less ignored in detailed critical studies of Jenkins's fiction, and those which include it are mainly general in nature. Hart's discussion is positive but brief, describing the novel as a 'reflective study of the mature need for love and the dangers of guarding innocence',¹⁴ while Glenda Norquay cites it as 'one of the best examples of Jenkins's technique of shifting from one character to another'.¹⁵ Edwin Morgan's generally appreciative discussion of the novel draws particular attention to the ambiguity of the title,¹⁶ while Moira Burgess commends it for encompassing 'several thoughtful portraits of women'.¹⁷ Further, Cairns Craig's recent book on the modern Scottish novel¹⁸ offers little significant commentary on the novel, apart from acknowledging it as one of Jenkins's novels which 'explore the destructive consequences of the efforts to integrate the displaced child into a new environment'¹⁹—and this categorisation does the novel an injustice, since the integration of the displaced children (the Sneddon boys) does eventually prove successful. Interestingly, the most detailed and perceptive discussion of *A Love of Innocence* is found in a *TLS* review of 1963.²⁰ Its author praises Jenkins's ambition and honesty in choosing the theme of 'self-knowledge and the destructive elements that lie at the heart of knowing who one is', and concludes by commenting that the plot is 'as simple and as tortuous as a Grand Master's chess game'.²¹ Considering this early enthusiastic praise, it seems surprising that *A Love of Innocence* has received only marginal treatment at best by those critics who have shown most enthusiasm for Jenkins's work in the past few decades.

Endnotes

- ¹ Parts of this chapter constitute a recently published article on the early fiction of Robin Jenkins. See Ingibjörg Ágústsdóttir, 'The Forgotten Novels of Robin Jenkins: A Thematic Survey', *Edinburgh Review* 106 (Spring 2001): 23-32.
- ² See Isobel Murray, Introduction, *Guests of War*, by Robin Jenkins (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988) xiv.
- ³ Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978) 277.
- ⁴ Judging from the description of Margaret Mathieson's and the Sneddons' journey to the island (LOI 39), it seems that Jenkins's model for Calisay is Colonsay.
- ⁵ 'Know Thyself', rev. of *A Love of Innocence*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 24 May 1963: 369.
- ⁶ *ibid* 369.
- ⁷ Orsay is probably derived from Oronsay, but there is a smaller island of this name off the south coast of Colonsay. Also, 'Oronsay' is the Gaelic for 'tidal island'. Orsay is a tidal island in the novel, since it is possible to cross over to it on foot when the tide is low.
- ⁸ Jenkins's comment that it is impossible for a 'thinking Scot' not to think about religion supports this idea: he admits that it has been impossible for him to avoid referring to religion in his work. See Personal Interview 16.
- ⁹ Hart 278.
- ¹⁰ This also makes Angus comparable to the later Fergus Lamont, who claims to have thorough understanding of the working class mind while arrogantly rejecting his proletarian background and aspiring to the position of an aristocrat.
- ¹¹ Jenkins has commented that Angus sitting in the graveyard in *A Love of Innocence* is his favourite scene. See Robin Jenkins, interview, 'The Symbolism of Good and Evil: Studies in the Novels of Robin Jenkins', by Winifride Logan, Diss., U of Glasgow, 1991, 45.
- ¹² Hart 278.
- ¹³ 'Know Thyself' 369.
- ¹⁴ Hart 278.
- ¹⁵ Glenda Norquay, 'Robin Jenkins', *British Novelists Since 1960*, ed. Jay L. Halio, vol. 14 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1983) 436.
- ¹⁶ Edwin Morgan, *Essays* (Cheadle Hulme: Carcanet, 1974) 244.
- ¹⁷ Moira Burgess, 'Robin Jenkins: A Novelist of Scotland', *Library Review* vol. 22, no. 8 (1970): 411.
- ¹⁸ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999).
- ¹⁹ *ibid* 110.
- ²⁰ 'Know Thyself' 369.
- ²¹ *ibid* 369.

Part III: The Foreign Fiction

Chapter 1:

Beyond Scotland

This part of the thesis will focus on the novels and stories that are based on Robin Jenkins's years abroad, but these make up a third of Jenkins's overall achievement. Jenkins worked as a teacher in Kabul, Afghanistan, from 1957 to 1959; in Barcelona, Spain, from 1959 to 1961; and in Sabah (Borneo), Malaysia, from 1963 to 1968. During this period, he started to write fiction set in these countries, and published the first of these, *Some Kind of Grace*, in 1960. However, after returning to Scotland in 1968 he soon resumed writing about his own country, and after 1974, all his published novels except *Leila* (1995) are set in Scotland.¹

Despite publishing the occasional 'Scottish' novel during his years abroad, and even though Jenkins's native background and his passion for Scotland are evident in most of his foreign fiction, the foreign period arguably represents a temporary deviation from Scotland, providing settings in which Jenkins took the opportunity to address his central moral questions from a different angle. As argued by Glenda Norquay, Jenkins's travels 'allowed him to develop further the themes of moral alienation and the limits of human understanding which were central to the concerns of his Scottish novels'.² In certain ways, moreover, Jenkins's travels and foreign fiction enabled him to return to later Scottish settings with a new insight into Scotland as subject matter, and it is his own claim that his travels were useful for this: 'I would need as wide a perspective as possible if I was to go home and see Scotland fresh and truthfully'.³ At the same time, Jenkins's interest in questions of morality, the limits of idealism, and social hypocrisy is even further manifested in his foreign work, and especially when viewed in the context of his treatment of racial difference and colonial subjugation. Thus, as Douglas Gifford suggests, the foreign novels 'introduced yet deeper confusions of morality and idealism, in their presentation of central characters whose choices go beyond the personal to questions of race, culture, and the politics of third world countries struggling for fairness and identity'.⁴ Alongside this, Jenkins's central issues achieve a more universal resonance in these novels since they are examined through characters and settings outside of Scotland. Significantly, Jenkins has remarked that by travelling he might have been 'looking for universal themes not to be found [...] in parochial Scotland'.⁵

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The colonial awareness of Jenkins's foreign work poses significant questions in relation to Britain's relationship with its former colonies, and about Scotland's part in the British

Empire. In this sense, some theories of postcolonialism are relevant when analysing Jenkins's perspective on the Empire and the central themes of his foreign fiction. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the British Empire as 'the envy of the other great powers, the greatest empire the world had ever seen'.⁶ Born at the end of the period of Britain's imperial heyday,⁷ Jenkins grew up during World War I and the early interwar years. His most formative years as a young adult must therefore have been within the later interwar period. This is important because this period saw the rise of a new debate which was characterised by 'a growing uneasiness that much of the talk about the moral mission in the Empire was hypocritical'.⁸ It was increasingly being questioned whether the British Empire might even be immoral: 'Were the rights of native peoples being respected? Was the Empire simply a means whereby greedy whites exploited local populations who were forced into submission by the civil and military authorities?'⁹ In literature, E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* had already in 1924 questioned the attitudes and conduct of the British towards Indians. Jenkins was undoubtedly aware of this debate, and must have done some independent stock-taking on the moral values of imperialism during these and the following years, which saw British imperial policy often marked by uncertainty, upheaval, and political and individual disagreement.¹⁰ In the 1950s and 1960s, the Empire was dying.¹¹ British influence in the colonies was gradually diminishing as calls for independence became increasingly insistent, and Britain had already lost the Jewel in the Crown, India, which became independent in 1947. Accordingly, Jenkins's years abroad fall within a period which was marked by the rapid decline of the British Empire. Although Sabah in Malaysia is the only former British colony where Jenkins lived during his years abroad, British influence had been considerable also in Afghanistan, as is made evident in Jenkins's novels set there. Interestingly, Jenkins's first year in Sabah (1963) was the same year in which Sabah became independent by joining with the new state of Malaysia, which came into existence that year.¹² This political development is clearly felt in Jenkins's Borneo stories, where the problematic change from colonial dependence to self-government is made explicit.

As the following chapters will show, the foreign fiction suggests that Jenkins was sympathetic towards natives and colonies subjected to British rule.¹³ Throughout, the foreign stories question the moral value of imperial appropriation and exploitation of colonies' resources. Simultaneously, Jenkins's treatment of racial difference emphasises and criticises British expatriates' Eurocentric arrogance and prejudice towards natives. The issues dealt with in Jenkins's writing about countries under—or devolving from—British influence therefore correspond perfectly with many aspects of postcolonial theory concerned with the relationship between East and West. In many of Jenkins's foreign

narratives, we see the imposing of a British imperial 'truth' upon the natives of countries like Borneo and Afghanistan, where British expatriates (and former colonialists) see the native culture as backward and barbaric. This is defined by Edward W. Said as 'the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness'.¹⁴ Yet, while the colonialists feel that Western standards should replace 'backward' Eastern ways of thinking, they nevertheless feel threatened if the natives become too similar to their colonial superiors. In Homi K. Bhabha's terms, this reflects a 'desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*' (his emphasis).¹⁵ Thus, in Berthold Schoene's words, another culture's 'potential for sameness and equality ... is perceived as a menace to British superiority'.¹⁶ This aspect of imperial ideology is made apparent in Jenkins's fiction. For example, it constitutes the reason why Michael Eking's accusation against Harold Elphin is hushed up in *The Holy Tree*. Eking has no right to criticise the European Elphin because Eking is *only* a backward native, and his mimicking Western ways in writing open letters of complaint to the newspapers is simply dismissed as revolutionary: 'It did not matter whether what he had written was true or false ... All that mattered was that no native should be allowed to accuse Englishmen, especially in their own language' (*HT* 78). Similarly, Abdul Wahab's wish to marry an Englishwoman and to become an important member of the Afghan community with her support is viewed with disapproval and disgust in *Dust on the Paw*. Yet that very English 'charity' of introducing Western values and habits to these communities results in Western values and habits being sought after and frequently adopted by many in the native society, because the natives perceive the rejection of their own culture and identification with their European oppressors as the only possible way out of their imposed inferiority.

Said's argument that 'all Western discourse about the East is determined in the last instance by the will to domination over Oriental territories and peoples'¹⁷ further relates to attitudes depicted in Jenkins's foreign works. The societies and situations portrayed in these stories show us a colonial power which has used its advanced scientific knowledge to exploit the colonies' resources, thereby depriving the native people of the opportunity to use their countries' resources for their own economic benefit and scientific progress. Furthermore, Jenkins's foreign fiction explores the ways in which fixed ideas of racial difference and Western cultural advantage determine British or European attitudes towards their colonial subjects. The concept of Eastern people as 'a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves'¹⁸ is echoed throughout the foreign novels and short stories. Hugh Macpherson in the title story of *A Far Cry From Bowmore* interprets the Indian Dr. Lall's

sentimentality over the dying McArthur as proof of the Indians' essential inferior nature: 'It was a fault of his [Lall's] race. Small wonder a handful of level-headed British had held countless millions of them in subjection for over a hundred years' (*FC* 151-152). At the same time, it is evident that British feelings of racial and cultural superiority are rooted in a centuries-old misconceived ideology based on racial inequality. This is what Said refers to as 'second-order Darwinism', which caused 'binary typology of advanced and backward (or subject) races, cultures, and societies' to be carried forward within the imperialist debate in the late nineteenth century.¹⁹

Arguably, Jenkins's sympathy for natives and colonies subjected to British rule is partly derived from his Scottish background, his nationalist leanings, and his critical stance towards Scotland's status within Britain since the 1707 Union of Parliaments.²⁰ In certain ways, Jenkins may have viewed the natives' plight of subordination to Britain as comparable to the Scottish situation within the United Kingdom. Indeed, arguments of the Scottish Literary Renaissance had already in the 1930s made this kind of analogy, which means that Jenkins—old enough to be aware of this phase in Scottish nationalism—could have been influenced by their debate. Following this, it has often been claimed that Scotland is the subordinate partner to England within the United Kingdom, and that Scottish resources, such as the North Sea Oil, have been unfairly used by Westminster to the benefit of England and the disadvantage of Scotland.²¹ Moreover, Michael Hechter, in his study of 'internal colonialism' in the British Isles,²² continues Scottish Renaissance ideas in his argument that the 'incorporation of the Celtic periphery into England can ... be seen to be imperial in nature',²³ and that some aspects of internal colonialism 'bear many similarities to descriptions of the overseas colonial situation'.²⁴ In light of this, it seems fair to say that Scotland's position can be compared to that of the colonies. The linguistic history of Scotland reinforces this idea further, as Standard English was forced upon those who spoke Gaelic or Scots (although many actually chose to adopt English), deeming those variants of language unfit for usage in Scotland as part of the UK. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin emphasise the importance of language within (post)colonial discourse:

One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language ... [wherein the] imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the imperial language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' and impurities.²⁵

Berthold Schoene argues for Scotland's postcolonial status, claiming that the 'history of colonial oppression [of Scotland by England] has been more brutal and incisive than the mere cultural marginalisation deplored and inveighed against by contemporary white Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders'.²⁶ This would appear to place Scotland alongside Eastern cultures which also have a history of brutal colonial oppression, even

though Scotland's 'loss of national sovereignty was not so much the consequence of a violent conquest'²⁷ as it was usually in the Eastern colonies. According to Schoene, Scotland's experiences as a 'colony' are on the whole far from being as negative as the Eastern colonies' experiences, but Scotland has nevertheless enough history of English oppression to make it comparable to the Eastern colonies.

However, Scotland's role within the British Empire is extremely paradoxical and dual in nature. Schoene fails to acknowledge that the role of the Scots themselves in the imperial mission complicates things considerably, despite the seeming parallels between Scotland and the colonies. According to Richard Finlay, the Scots 'prided themselves on being a race of empire builders' in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and for them, the British Empire 'was as much a Scottish creation as an English one'.²⁸ Kitchen notes the Scots' contribution to the Empire: 'Scots ... gave the service a particular flavour as they applied the ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment to political economy, education, and statistical research'.²⁹ Finlay further argues that the 'Scottish role in the creation of the British Empire has undoubtedly been the biggest factor in the making of modern Scottish national identity',³⁰ and that the imperial mission resulted in the Scottish national self-esteem being raised to heights 'never before experienced'.³¹ Also, Michael Gorra suggests that in the 18th century a common British identity emerged which was 'confirmed, for the Scots especially, by a subsequent history of imperial service'.³² It is clear, therefore, that it is impossible to make any simplistic comparison of Scotland with the colonies. Indeed, Ashcroft *et al* maintain that the Scottish, Welsh, and Irish 'complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonized peoples outside Britain to accept their identity as postcolonial'.³³ However, by recognising the existing parallels, we can appreciate that Scotland's relationship to the British Empire and the colonies was extremely dual and paradoxical in nature. Thus it could be said that Scotland was in some ways both an imperialist power and a 'colony' within that power.

It seems very likely that Jenkins recognised this duality. Indeed, many of his foreign stories emphasise the complicated relationship between the Scots as *colonised* and the Scots as *coloniser*. The use (or non-use) of Scottish characters in Jenkins's foreign fiction often involves a questioning of whether the British Empire should be seen as British or simply as *English*. The fact that many Scots are among the colonialists suggests that the imperial power is indeed British and based on the united efforts of Englishmen, Irishmen, Welshmen and Scotsmen alike. However, while he is clearly critical of the Scottish part in the Empire, Jenkins repeatedly draws our attention to the fact that his native characters refer to the colonialist Scots as English and *not* British. This tells us that the people of colonised nations, at least, think of the Empire as English, and obviously do not make any

distinction between a Scotsman and an Englishman. Gorra draws attention to the hegemonic relationship of Englishness and Scottishness within the imperial frame, despite a common British identity:

‘Britishness’ became inseparable from the official nationalism of empire; one holds a British passport, not an English one. Yet within that political identity a more narrowly defined English one has always exercised hegemony, in a way that often makes the terms interchangeable.³⁴

Jenkins’s foreign fiction demonstrates clearly this kind of hegemony by emphasising the assimilation of both ‘Scottish’ and ‘British’ by ‘English’. For example, Michael Eking in *The Holy Tree* sees the Scottish John Melrose as English (*HT* 118), and John McLeod in *Some Kind of Grace* says he is English when he goes to speak with the alleged and condemned murderers of his compatriots Donald Kemp and Margaret Duncan (*SKG* 50), despite his usual insistence that he is British and not English. During his search for them, McLeod also refers to the lost couple as English, even though they are both Scottish like himself. While this is part of McLeod’s strategy in asserting authority over the Afghans, his use of ‘English’ also works as a simplification, as the division of British imperial identity into English and Scottish would diminish the comprehension of natives. This shows clearly the imbalance between ‘English’ and ‘Scottish’ in the context of empire. And even today it is still a common error in other countries to call a Scottish person English. By thus subtly emphasising this kind of identity power imbalance, Jenkins’s foreign fiction highlights the paradox and duality of the Scots’ part in the Empire.

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In his discussion of the exotic short story,³⁵ Robert Gish refers to a larger tradition of exoticism, which includes Robert Louis Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, W. Somerset Maugham and Graham Greene. Gish argues that these authors and others ‘dramatize the conflicts of personality and culture experienced by travellers in lands which ... are indisputably strange’, and that each is ‘preoccupied with the interactions of the British interloper and the indigenous native in a locale which to the one is familiar and to the other is strange’.³⁶ According to Gish, exoticism is ‘far from static and is by definition concerned with interrelationships among white “stranger”, indigenous “native”, and ... alien landscapes’.³⁷ In many ways, Jenkins’s foreign fiction can be classified as ‘exotic’: it is set in an unfamiliar locale, often focuses on relationships and conflicts between white expatriates and natives, and consistently draws attention to exotic landscapes and atmosphere. In this sense, Jenkins’s foreign work fits Gish’s definition of the exotic tradition and can be compared to fiction written by novelists such as Stevenson, Kipling, and Greene. Also, it has been claimed that Jenkins’s foreign stories ‘match anything written by outsiders about Afghanistan or South East Asia’.³⁸ Jenkins’s years abroad and

his use of non-Scottish settings in his fiction thus places him within the group of exotic writers who 'in the process of coming to terms with their own brand of self-imposed exile among strangers, incorporated elements of the exotic worlds they knew firsthand into the artistry of their stories'.³⁹

But although Jenkins's foreign stories deal with conflicts of environment and culture, and their alien settings add extra spice to their telling, Jenkins is more than just a writer of the exotic. As demonstrated above, British imperialism figures predominantly in the fiction set abroad, and Jenkins's critique of the imperial enterprise is evident. Although British literature of the exotic frequently derives its storylines and settings from places that were part of the British Empire, be it Kipling's India-based *Kim* (1901), Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900) and 'Heart of Darkness' (1902), or E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), not all of it is overtly critical of imperialism. Indeed, Kipling's devotion to the so-called civilising mission in the colonies was such that his verse added the phrase 'the white man's burden' to the language of imperialism.⁴⁰ Moreover, novels such as those mentioned above were written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the British Empire was at its strongest and had most of its colonies firmly under control, and were mostly written by authors who had at some point in their lives served the Empire abroad. Jenkins differs from the above in that his stories portray a dying Empire that is still, ironically, trying to exert its influence on former colonies and, despite the scepticism and disillusionment of the interwar years and World War II, still retains its arrogant ideas of racial superiority and justification in educating and civilising 'backward', 'innocent', and 'childlike' natives. Also, Jenkins differs from most of the writers mentioned above in that he never actively worked for the British Empire, as Sabah was freed from British rule the year he arrived there to teach English.

This is not to say that Jenkins was the first British writer to criticise imperialism. Some of Joseph Conrad's novels and shorter fictions, such as *Almayer's Folly* (1895), *Lord Jim* (1900), and 'Heart of Darkness' (1902) reveal the author's scepticism towards the supposed morality of the civilising mission.⁴¹ Moreover, when it was first published, Forster's *A Passage to India* was criticised for anti-British bias,⁴² but Forster opposed British rule in India and hoped 'that his novel would help to hasten the advent of Indian independence'.⁴³ In more general terms, Forster's novel presents the spiritualism of India as a remedy for an outdated, degenerated, and morally decadent West. Furthermore, George Orwell's service with the Indian Imperial Police in Burma resulted in his rejection of imperialism⁴⁴ and the novel *Burmese Days* (1934), which exposes 'the imperial elite to ruthless analysis'⁴⁵ and 'forcefully indicts imperialism by demonstrating that the unwanted rule of one race over another is morally indefensible'.⁴⁶ In fact, Jenkins's foreign fiction is

in some ways reminiscent of Orwell's novel. For instance, the expatriate Ellis of Orwell's story sees the native Burmese as unclean and inferior, and he is furious when the government encourages admitting Asians to clubs that were formerly exclusively white. This reaction is echoed in Jenkins's *The Expatriates*, when the Livingstones grumble over the Asian members of the golf club (TE 79), and further in *A Figure of Fun*, when Alastair Campbell's motion to admit Asians to the yacht club is voted against by all members but two (FOF 45). In both Orwell's and Jenkins's stories, the expatriates view the admittance of Asians into their clubs as an insult to their racial superiority.

While Jenkins and his treatment of the Empire can thus be compared to earlier English writers such as Conrad and Orwell, he is arguably among the first of Scottish writers to criticise imperialism, although the Empire was already a theme in some nineteenth and early twentieth century Scottish writing. Douglas Dunn argues that the Empire has rarely been the subject of Scottish fiction: 'But for all the vigorous exploitation of the Empire by Scots, the imperial theme and its taint enter Scottish fiction hardly at all, except through Scott and Stevenson, who took the Empire as a fact of life'.⁴⁷ However, Dunn's short discussion of this issue obviously cannot do full justice to what has actually been written in Scotland on the Empire. Indeed, the Empire creates the background to some traditional historical romances, such as James Grant's *The Romance of War* (1845), Neil Munro's *Gilian the Dreamer* (1899), and John Buchan's *Greenmantle* (1916), and there are recurrent allusions to Empire in the work of the so-called kailyard novelists, such as Norman McLeod's *Friends of the Highlanders* (1867). And even though Stevenson may have seen the Empire as 'a fact of life', his treatment of the imperial theme in stories such as 'The Beach of Falesá' (1893) and *The Ebb-Tide* (1894) is deeply satirical. Importantly, Jenkins counts Stevenson among his favourite authors, with reference to, among others, *Treasure Island* (1883), *Kidnapped* (1886), and 'The Beach of Falesá'.⁴⁸ In its allusion to the underlying immorality of white exploitation in the colonies, 'The Beach of Falesá' is clearly comparable to Jenkins's foreign work, and therefore it could have been inspirational to Jenkins's creation of expatriates and (semi) colonial settings.

In addition to the above weaknesses in Dunn's argument, he could well have suggested Jenkins as a more contemporary example of Scottish writing on the imperial theme. Next to Stevenson, Jenkins is perhaps among the first of Scottish novelists to treat British imperialism in depth and from an intimate, critical viewpoint. Overall, his approach to colonialism is marked by clear sardonic emphasis on the folly of colonial exploitation, colour prejudice, and racial arrogance. Not many twentieth century Scottish writers are comparable to Jenkins in this respect, and even though William Boyd's *A Good Man in Africa* (1981) and *An Ice-Cream War* (1982) carry imperial echoes,⁴⁹ these novels

were published two decades after Jenkins's first foreign novel came out in 1960. However, Eric Linklater's short story 'Country-Born' (1935) is perhaps the closest comparison.⁵⁰ Set in India, it tells the story of Jerry O'Driscoll, an Irishman of mixed Anglo-Indian blood who, until the day of his death, has managed to keep his Indian origin hidden from the British community. The story blatantly suggests that if the expatriates had discovered O'Driscoll's secret, he would have been excluded from their company and shunned by his British friends.⁵¹ Even so, Linklater's irony is so ambiguous that the reader cannot be sure whether he is condemning or condoning racial prejudice:

It was a cruel system, this social philosophy of Englishmen in the East, but looking at the woman and the disgusting small boy Manderson could not honestly condemn it. It was this racial fastidiousness which had saved England from the fate of Portugal. Portuguese India, that gorgeous crown of a proud and gallant nation, had become the home of cooks and menials; Goa, the city of magnificent cathedrals and unimaginable wealth, was a dilapidated ruin. And all because the Portuguese had married into India after invading it, had consummated their victory in lawful wedlock and begotten their etiolated kind on the women they had captured and converted. But England, avoiding conscious procreation and devoting her energies to trade and conquest, had won supremacy as the reward of continence—or better, perhaps, of discretion.⁵²

Many of Jenkins's foreign stories, such as *Dust on the Paw*, *The Expatriates*, and *Leila*, are concerned with inter-racial relationships and prejudice towards half-caste children. Jenkins's approach to these issues has a similar kind of irony to Linklater's, but is much more overt in its criticism of imperial ideology and colour prejudice. For instance, Jenkins's fiction frequently compares racism to serious diseases such as consumption or cancer, as in *The Tiger of Gold* (TG 23) and in *The Expatriates* (TE 157). Through making an analogy between racism and a deadly disease, Jenkins presents colour prejudice as an incurable condition that has taken root in Western (white) mentality. By this means, Jenkins emphasises the negative repercussions of racial prejudice; just as cancer ultimately kills its victims, racism is destructive for the moral and social wellbeing of humanity.

Endnotes

- ¹ Although they are partly set abroad, I do not classify *A Very Scotch Affair* and *Willie Hogg* among the foreign novels, since both narratives begin and end in Scotland.
- ² Glenda Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins, and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985, 269.
- ³ Robin Jenkins, 'Why I decided Scotland must be seen through fresh and truthful eyes', *Glasgow Herald* 12 October 1982: 11.
- ⁴ Douglas Gifford, 'Spring Fiction: Dreams of Love and Justice', *Books in Scotland* 57 (Spring 1996): 12.
- ⁵ Jenkins, 'Why I decided' 11.
- ⁶ Martin Kitchen, *The British Empire and Commonwealth: A Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1996) 48.
- ⁷ See Kitchen 43-60. Kitchen terms the years 1876-1914 as 'The Heyday of Empire'.
- ⁸ *ibid* 75.
- ⁹ *ibid* 75.
- ¹⁰ See Kitchen 61-122.
- ¹¹ Kitchen deals with this period in a chapter entitled 'The End of the Empire'. See Kitchen 123-142.
- ¹² See T. O. Lloyd, *The British Empire 1558-1995* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 360-361.
- ¹³ When I asked Jenkins about his opinion of the British Empire, his reply was ambiguous and non-committal. Nevertheless, it clearly indicates his deeply sceptical, if not critical, views of the imperial mission: 'As for my views on the British and their empire I'd have to think longer than I wish to dig them out. Recently I was offered an O.B.E. and swithered mightily about accepting it. I couldn't see myself as an Officer of the British Empire, but in the end I decided the honour – if it was one – was for Scottish Literature and not really for me. All my life I have had an instinctive sympathy for the underdog' (Robin Jenkins, letter to the author 14 December 2000).
- ¹⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1995) 7.
- ¹⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 86.
- ¹⁶ Berthold Schoene, 'A Passage to Scotland: Scottish Literature and the British Postcolonial Condition', *Scotlands* 2.1 (1995): 119.
- ¹⁷ Bart Moore-Gilbert, Gareth Stanton, and Willy Maley, eds., *Postcolonial Criticism* (London: Longman, 1997) 22-23.
- ¹⁸ Said, *Orientalism* 35.
- ¹⁹ *ibid* 206.
- ²⁰ See Personal Interview 15. Jenkins views Scotland's status within the UK as marginal, and he votes for the SNP.
- ²¹ See Richard J. Finlay, 'National Identity: From British Empire to European Union', *Modern Scottish History 1707 to the Present*, Vol. 2, eds. Anthony Cooke, Ian Donnachie, Ann McSween, and Christopher A. Whatley (Phantassie: Tuckwell, 1998) 42-43. Finlay notes that the Thatcher experiment of the early 1980s 'could not have taken place without the revenues of North Sea Oil' (43).
- ²² Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.
- ²³ *ibid* 65.
- ²⁴ *ibid* 32-33.
- ²⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989) 7.
- ²⁶ Schoene 109.
- ²⁷ *ibid* 108.
- ²⁸ Finlay 28.
- ²⁹ Kitchen 19.
- ³⁰ Finlay 28.
- ³¹ *ibid* 29.
- ³² Michael Gorra, *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 11.
- ³³ Ashcroft et al 33.
- ³⁴ Gorra 11.
- ³⁵ Robert Gish, 'The Exotic Short Story: Kipling and Others', *The English Short Story 1880-1945: A Critical History*, ed. Joseph M. Flora (Boston: Twayne, 1985) 1-37.
- ³⁶ *ibid* 2.
- ³⁷ *ibid* 5.
- ³⁸ Bernard Sellin, 'Robin Jenkins: The Making of the Novelist', *Cencrastus* 24 (1986): 9.
- ³⁹ Gish 4.
- ⁴⁰ See the entry for Rudyard Kipling in Margaret Drabble, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 535-536.
- ⁴¹ For further discussion of Joseph Conrad's views on imperialism, see Andrea White, 'Conrad and Imperialism', *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 179-202. White points out that Conrad has been cited by Peter Nazareth (a Goan-Ugandan writer) as 'the first to provide some criticism of imperialism' (White 197).

⁴² Drabble 736.

⁴³ Robin Jared Lewis, 'The Literature of the Raj', *Asia in Western Fiction*, eds. Robin W. Winks and James R. Rush (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990) 54.

⁴⁴ For further discussion of Orwell's views of imperialism see Stephen Ingle, 'The anti-imperialism of George Orwell', *Literature and the Political Imagination*, eds. John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister (London: Routledge, 1996) 218-237.

⁴⁵ Ingle 220.

⁴⁶ Lewis 64-65.

⁴⁷ Douglas Dunn, Introduction, *The Oxford Book of Scottish Short Stories*, ed. Douglas Dunn (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) xxiv.

⁴⁸ Personal Interview 13.

⁴⁹ See Douglas Dunn, 'Divergent Scottishness: William Boyd, Allan Massie, Ronald Frame', *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) 149-169. Dunn remarks that despite the imperial echoes of *An Ice-Cream War*, Boyd 'makes little of what seems an opportunity for a more penetrating or thoughtful discursion on British and German colonialism than his comic tendencies permit' (152).

⁵⁰ Eric Linklater, 'Country-Born', *The Oxford Book of Scottish Short Stories*, ed. Douglas Dunn (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995) 199-205. Linklater's story was first published in *God likes them Plain* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935).

⁵¹ This aspect of Linklater's story echoes W. Somerset Maugham's 'Yellow Streak' (1951). Set in Borneo, it is the story of Izzart, who is constantly afraid that his British friends and colleagues will find out that his mother is a half-caste Eurasian.

⁵² Linklater, 'Country-Born' 203.

Chapter 2:

Journeys of discovery: *Some Kind of Grace* (1960), *The Tiger of Gold* (1962), and 'A Far Cry From Bowmore' (1973)

The two novels and the short story dealt with in this section have several things in common. The main characters in all narratives are Scottish, and while engaged in different stages of moral and social questioning, they also go on actual journeys that lead to personal discoveries and self-confrontations. Thus John McLeod's travels through the vast beautiful valleys and mountains of Afghanistan in *Some Kind of Grace* are not only adventurous and dangerous, but also symbolic of his own quest for some kind of natural vision of grace. Similarly, Sheila McNair's trip from Afghanistan to India in *The Tiger of Gold* becomes a journey of self-discovery leading to a new knowledge and appreciation of herself and others, as is Hugh Macpherson's short journey to meet a dying compatriot in the wild forests of Kalimantan in 'A Far Cry From Bowmore'. Simultaneously, all three narratives share a strong concern with the moral implications of colour prejudice, racial difference, and social hypocrisy.

Apart from *Fergus Lamont* and *Childish Things*, *The Tiger of Gold* is the only novel in which Jenkins uses a first person narrative point of view. This means that we are allowed insight into only one character's mind throughout the novel, a thing rarely seen in Jenkins's other fiction. Jenkins usually applies various third person perspectives within his stories, frequently shifting narrative focus, and thus presents many and varied approaches to and viewpoints on the issues dealt with throughout. This, according to Glenda Norquay, 'increases his [Jenkins's] power to disorient and unsettle the reader'.¹ However, although *Some Kind of Grace* and 'A Far Cry From Bowmore' are third person narratives, they present mainly the protagonist's perspective, apart from parts of the short story in which knowledge is given of viewpoints such as Mary Macpherson's. Therefore the three protagonists' experiences are related principally through themselves (in Sheila McNair's case, because hers is a first person narrative), and this contributes further to the similarities among the three stories.



Some Kind of Grace tells the story of John McLeod's thrilling and hazardous journey into the wild mountains of Afghanistan to seek an answer to the mysterious disappearance of his compatriots Donald Kemp and Margaret Duncan. On a hunch, McLeod leaves the city of Kabul without the authorities' permission, despite all evidence that the vanished couple were in fact murdered by the villagers of isolated Haimir. Initially, McLeod's journey seems a hopeless search for people everybody believes dead, but he eventually finds the

couple alive, living with native Afghan people in an isolated valley not far from the Russian border. After reluctantly promising the heavily pregnant Margaret Duncan not to reveal their existence or whereabouts, McLeod leaves her and the dying Donald Kemp behind and returns to Kabul, where he tells no one that he found them alive. The story ends with a letter to McLeod from Margaret Duncan, thanking him for keeping her secret safe.

As the title of *Some Kind of Grace* indicates, it is a novel very much concerned with the concept of grace. In addition, the title suggests an elusiveness to the concept of grace, signifying perhaps a major point of contrast with conventional Calvinist and Christian notions of grace. Hart notes the significance of the concept in the novel, saying that it deals with the 'sighting of signs of grace amid perverted love and misery',² and that therefore the 'trick is in learning to recognize signs of grace'.³ As becomes increasingly evident as the narrative progresses, the novel's emphasis rests not on any fixed idea of grace but on *some kind* of grace, and this is revealed through the various searches for grace that take place in the story. Many of the novel's characters seek a sign of grace in their lives; Donald Kemp in his seemingly perverse and falsely acclaimed chastity, Margaret Duncan in her devotion to both Kemp and her religious beliefs, and John McLeod in his search for the lost couple. Each character finds a different kind of grace, and Margaret's faith and McLeod's atheism emphasise the two main levels on which the idea of grace is presented. These are the spiritual or religious level, on one hand, and the human level, on the other.

On the spiritual level, the missionary zeal of the lost couple and Margaret Duncan's invincible faith in God and His choosing a fate for herself and her child carry overtones of predestination. The novel seems to argue that if religious grace exists in the first place, it has been bestowed on Margaret Duncan and her unborn child. More specifically, there is an implicit analogy between Margaret's baby and Jesus Christ. Reminiscent of the journey of Joseph with the pregnant Mary in the Bible, Margaret and Donald travel on a donkey through Afghanistan. More importantly, Donald adamantly denies having had sexual relations with Margaret—despite her assertions to the contrary—and it is eventually revealed that she was not raped by the men who attacked her during their journey. The ambiguous mystery surrounding the true paternity of Margaret's child thus shows Jenkins playing with the Biblical idea of immaculate conception, which again relates to the novel's focus on the concept of grace. However, countering this religious element is McLeod's almost savage atheism, which causes him to see 'God's hand in nothing' (SKG 185). Hostile to Margaret's religiosity, McLeod reflects on her possible lovemaking with Donald Kemp: '... there could be little doubt that before it she would have gasped out *some kind of*

grace, and after it a thanksgiving' (SKG 188, italics mine). Even though McLeod perceives grace in Margaret's 'depth and intricacy of suffering' (SKG 196), her beliefs are nevertheless 'insanely contradictory' to him (SKG 189), and eventually he is glad to leave the valley because he finds her religiosity 'intolerable' (SKG 211). McLeod's scepticism towards religion therefore casts an ambiguous light on Margaret's spiritual worth.

As opposed to Margaret Duncan's faith, McLeod's vision of grace is based on humanity. During his travels he has various encounters with native Afghan people whose dignity and noble endurance have a lasting effect on him. For example, McLeod initially thinks of the Haimir people as far below his own level, seeing them as less than human. Thus he judges the children as 'more like a species of monkey than human children' (SKG 120), and perceives the women as 'sexually repellent as female baboons' (SKG 121). He decides that they are quite capable of murder because in his opinion they have not 'reached the stage of morality' (SKG 126). Nevertheless, as it dawns on him that these extremely poor and depraved people are in fact innocent of the murder they have been brutally punished for, McLeod finds in them surprising strength of spirit considering the severe and unjust punishment they have had to suffer (they have been interrogated and tortured by the Afghan police, and two of the villagers have been executed). Moreover, the old woman's smile of 'acceptance and forgiveness' (SKG 124) becomes something he is never to forget afterwards. Accordingly, in spite of the initial negative impression of the Haimir people on McLeod, their suffering and courage become manifestations that human grace and dignity exist. Despite their dirt, poverty, and ignorance, the people of Haimir illuminate the narrative, and provide McLeod with a vision of grace in which he can truly believe.

On the surface, McLeod is presented as a complicated character, but at the same time he experiences little of the profound self-examinations, self-confrontations, and self-discoveries that we see in many of Jenkins's moral pilgrims. In this sense, McLeod is not a well rounded character, because although we are given access to his thoughts, Jenkins avoids delving deep into his protagonist's psychology, and we can only engage with McLeod on a very superficial level. This could be caused by the fact that *Some Kind of Grace* is more an adventure story than a story focused on personal development. Jenkins has said that his idea of this novel 'was a thriller, because if there ever was a country where you can set thrilling stories, it was Afghanistan'.⁴ Because of its fast and eventful narrative pace and local colour, combined with moral ambiguity, *Some Kind of Grace* is one of the novels where the influence of Robert Louis Stevenson on Jenkins can best be seen. Consider, for example, McLeod's encounter with the dying chief Abdul Raof Khan and his men. Captured by Khan's men and brought to the chief, McLeod expects his death because of Khan's reputation as an 'old ruffian famous throughout the country for his life-

long hatred of the British' (SKG 104). Jenkins uses the backdrop of the Afghan wars to explain: 'In the war against [the British]... his [Khan's] father had been killed and he himself had lost his right hand' (SKG 104). In his maimed and heroic if malignant grandeur, the old chief comes through as Jenkins's own version of Long John Silver of *Treasure Island*, while McLeod's travels through the dangerous mountains of Afghanistan, where skirmishes between clans of 'wild hill-men' (SKG 104) are rife and can prove a threat to his life, may be somewhat influenced by adventures such as David Balfour's in *Kidnapped*. At the same time, Jenkins characteristically undermines the initial feeling of danger with the 'crafty old cut-throat' turned into a 'patriarch of a tribe of harmless shepherds, with long white hair and beard, and a face refined by suffering and compassionate thought' (SKG 111). The way in which Khan's supposed desire to revenge himself on McLeod is changed into a dying man's almost absurd wish to apologise to the English king for having spat on his picture reveals some of Jenkins's mischievous sense of humour while indicating that Jenkins has a deliberate tendency to destabilise the reader. Reminiscent of, for instance, the ambiguous ending of *So Gaily Sings the Lark* and of Lady Runcie-Campbell's cathartic joy at the conclusion of *The Cone-Gatherers*, the reader's expectations are overthrown by a turn of events that are altogether perplexing. This moral trickery means that the reader is denied the comfort of narrative predictability, but instead is encouraged to think more carefully about possible reasons behind the strange turn of events.

While *Some Kind of Grace* is both a story of the search for grace and a thrilling adventure, it also paints a convincing picture of Afghanistan. The narrative focuses on many levels of Afghan society, and emphasises the miserable poverty and squalor of many Afghan people, thus suggesting the harshness, brutality, and social injustice of Afghan life. We see very poor, sick, and miserable people such as the villagers of Haimir, more fortunate yet relatively poor individuals like the teacher and headmaster at Kalak and the country farmers in Azim's valley, and more socially advanced people like Major Samad and Commandant Hussein, along with their inferiors in the Afghan military service. The presence of the British diplomats is also very evident, as they are important within the hierarchical structure presented, even though their influence as such in the country has been greatly diminished. Afghanistan always resisted a complete British domination, as demonstrated in the Afghan wars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,⁵ and referred to by Jenkins as the country's 'proud history of resistance to imperialism' (SKG 235). As clearly seen in *Some Kind of Grace*, the country is controlled very much by the regime, by strict law and order, and arbitrary justice, and nepotism and bribery is common in Afghan official ranks.

Furthermore, the question of racial difference is prominent, as can be seen in the example of Margaret Duncan and her unborn baby. The mere possibility that her child may be the offspring of one of two coloured men who attacked her during her journey with Kemp through Afghanistan—although we discover that there was no actual rape—raises questions about how that half-caste child would be received by Western society,⁶ and the narrative further suggests that even a *white* illegitimate child would be viewed with prejudice in Margaret's native Scotland. Also, McLeod's former intention to marry the Afghan girl Karima is treated with astonishment and incredulity by the British diplomat Minn, who asks 'who in his senses would ever think of marrying one of these women?' (SKG 244), clearly implying strong colour prejudice on the British side. At the conclusion of the novel, a letter from Minn to McLeod mentions the issue of an English woman coming to Afghanistan to marry an Afghan, questioning whether the Embassy should interfere or not. Apart from being a direct reference to Abdul Wahab's and Laura Johnstone's intended marriage dealt with in Jenkins's following novel, *Dust on the Paw*, the general attitude conveyed through Minn's letter suggests a strong prejudice against this kind of relationship between races.

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Like *Some Kind of Grace*, *The Tiger of Gold* is set in Afghanistan, but only partly since the second half of the story deals with Sheila McNair's trip to India with the Mouke family.⁷ It is a story of Sheila's love for Chandra, an Indian prince whom she first meets in Isban, Nurania (Afghanistan), and whom she subconsciously hopes to meet again on her trip to India. *The Tiger of Gold* has many characters that already appeared in *Dust on the Paw*, and it can therefore to an extent be viewed as a sequel to the earlier novel. However, *The Tiger of Gold* lacks the vivid portrayal of expatriate and native community that characterises *Dust on the Paw*, and neither does it have the earlier novel's intellectual depth, elaboration, and compassionate approach to social and moral complexities. Despite this, *The Tiger of Gold* is significant in its portrayal of character development and in its concern with moral, social, and racial issues.

A review of *The Tiger of Gold* argues that the book is 'unlikely to add anything at all to ... [Jenkins's] reputation' and names the first person narrative as one of the novel's faults: 'Everything is seen through her [Sheila's] eyes, and neither her responses, nor the language chosen to express them, are sensitive or even acute'.⁸ Francis Hart further remarks that in *The Tiger of Gold* Jenkins's 'inspiration seems to have run temporarily dry'.⁹ *The Tiger of Gold* is one of Jenkins's lesser achievements, especially since its portrayal of the heroine fails to be altogether convincing. This is mainly because Sheila seems too able to see things objectively and clearly for an eighteen-year-old girl in love for the first time. Too much of Jenkins's own ironic scepticism shines through his portrayal of

her to make her convincing as a schoolgirl aiming to enter Edinburgh University, brought up by a family of strong Presbyterian roots, and sustained in her lofty dreams by too much reading of romantic literature. Consider, for example, the following passage, where Sheila attempts to find some justification for the reputed dourness of the Scots:

Surely though it was an imposition on them rather than an essential part of their nature; too many unco-guids had come creeping out of John Knox's long dreich beard. Even today the Scots had the ability to be as gay as any other people, but it had not been cultivated and encouraged. I thought of Scottish schools, where the tawse in the desk was still the totem, and where the pupils studied like ants stripping a carcase, in silence, and repression. Most churches, too, were the haunts of peppermint-suckers, and platitude swallows. The grandest and most beautiful churches in Scotland were desolate ruins. (TG 153-154)

This ironic description of the effects of Scottish Calvinism is reminiscent of many scenes in Jenkins's fiction where a similar perspective is expressed through the narrative voice. That said, would the romantically inclined and naïve Sheila *really* think along those lines? Are not the last sentences of the passage more in line with what the Reverend Kinross of *So Gaily Sings the Lark* would think of his congregation? There is no evidence in Jenkins's presentation of her to suggest that Sheila has the maturity or experience to express such strong views on Scottish religion, and with such sarcasm as is displayed here. Indeed, Jenkins would probably have made *The Tiger of Gold* a more successful novel by using a third person narrative form, where a variety of different perspectives would have given him more flexibility to express his views on Calvinism in Scotland and other issues.

According to Ainslie T. Embree, many novelists 'use contemporary India as the arena in which their characters seek a meaning for their lives in the roaring whirl of the country'.¹⁰ Embree could easily have included Jenkins in his discussion, since the background of India is as important to Sheila's personal development as it is to the novel's central issues. Sheila's journey to see the wonders of India becomes a process of self-discovery, of learning to appreciate the goodness and strengths of people judged by her previously as insignificant and dull, and of positively accepting the hopelessness of a marriage between herself and Chandra. Her reflections as she visits the Red Fort of Delhi that she has been 'far too bitchy, prurient, superior, mean, and analytic' and her subsequent resolve to 'cultivate a little humility' (TG 157) shows her as convincingly affected by what she sees and experiences in India—as easily affected as a girl in her late teens would be by seeing and experiencing so many new and exciting things while extreme poverty and disease are also staring her in the face. Moreover, the journey to India causes Sheila's initial opinion of Mr Mouke as 'a rather crude, mercenary, bumptious, prejudiced American' to change, so that she ultimately sees him as 'one of the most human persons' she has ever met (TG 249). Accordingly, the novel deals with how the influence of India

changes Sheila's appreciation of herself and Mr Mouke. To a certain extent, this aspect of the narrative makes up for Jenkins's unconvincing portrayal of his main character.

Sheila's love for Chandra is significant to the development of her character, and this issue is also closely linked with the title of the novel. Chandra's possession of a life-sized tiger of solid gold not only suggests his wealth, but also how unattainable he really is. Like the tiger of gold, Chandra is an idol too far removed from Sheila's reality for her to be able to overcome the barriers between them. Throughout the novel, the tiger is presented as a symbol for both Chandra and his native country. When she meets him for the first time, Sheila sees in Chandra's eyes 'mysteries as beautiful as tigers' (*TG* 12), and when later seeing a group of Indian schoolboys in Delhi she thinks of tigers, and reflects: 'The thought of Chandra, too, flitted through my mind, swiftly, leaving little trace, like a tiger through jungle' (*TG* 155). Once in Rajpur, Sheila has to realise that it is really impossible for her and Chandra to marry, as their different cultural and social backgrounds make their union virtually inconceivable. To her, Chandra's world is almost impenetrable because it has for centuries been exclusively Indian, Eastern, with entirely different values from her Western background, enclosing only 'maharajah, fakir, beggar, and prolific peasant' (*TG* 196), while, on her own side, the Moukes represent 'the inescapability of the circle to which [she] ... really belonged' (*TG* 198). Jenkins's message is ultimately that, no matter how strong, love is not always enough, and this is what Sheila learns at the end of *The Tiger of Gold*, while finally recognising that the Chandra she loves is a creature fashioned from her own imagination, 'with help from too many coloured brochures' (*TG* 229).

The title of the novel is further significant in the context of Sheila's journey to India. The idea of 'a tiger of gold' is, naturally, ironic because it implies splendour and riches that, at the same time as applied to Chandra, are also associated with India. The tiger's unquestionable function as a symbol of India adds to the irony: despite India's rich and sophisticated past, a life-sized tiger of solid gold is hardly appropriate as a symbol for a country where the majority of the population suffer from hunger and disease. The novel ultimately questions whether the image of India given through the symbolism of golden tigers and splendid palaces is genuine or false, and whether the magnificent historical sites visited by Sheila and the Moukes are really representative of today's India or of a long outdated image of the country. This questioning is given focus in Janey Mouke's comment on India and the Indians' concern with the colour of their skin: '... they're ashamed themselves of being black, that's what. Except the beggars maybe, and the poor folk in the villages. India's phoney. All the beautiful things, like the Taj Mahal, are old' (*TG* 231).

Within Sheila's story, Jenkins tackles the issues of racial prejudice, social hypocrisy, and the unfair distribution of wealth in human society. Reaction among British

expatriates to Sheila's relationship with the wealthy and distinguished Chandra demonstrates both their racial prejudice and their social hypocrisy. In fact, the expatriate community is more shocked at Sheila's assumption that a rich Indian prince would ever dream of marrying her, than they are at his colour. This, it is implied, is because Chandra is rich, and therefore also partly because Sheila and her family are seen as social nobodies by people such as Lady Beaulieu. The characters who are most evidently racist nevertheless show their hypocrisy and sycophancy in their frequent flattering of Chandra. Thus it depends on the coloured character's wealth whether or not he or she is socially accepted by the whites. On the whole, *The Tiger of Gold* shows a strong awareness of race, and the language used by Jenkins in the novel implies much about the nature of colour prejudice. Even Sheila, who denies having any racial prejudice, admits that she had 'absorbed it as a child does its national customs and language', and that it is therefore a part of her, but 'only as the disease in his lungs is part of a consumptive' (TG 23). After meeting Chandra, she sees his colour 'as a kind of deformity too, which had never to be jeered at or despised, but always to be pitied and fiercely protected' (TG 23). Through making racial prejudice analogous to tuberculosis, Jenkins emphasises that, in fact, Sheila is affected more badly by racism than she would like to believe. Thinking that she is free of prejudice, it is instead an incurable condition imposed on her by a mentality that is based on imperial notions of white superiority. However, while Sheila's inherent racism cannot be seen with human eyes, Chandra's darkness of skin is clearly visible. That Sheila views his colour as a 'deformity' highlights further her underlying prejudice, since her perspective clearly places coloured people on an unequal footing with whites.

In terms of postcolonial theory, Sheila's relationship with Chandra is a means by which Jenkins uses and reverses 'the convention of the interracial love affair' as defined by Michael Gorra.¹¹ In colonial times, it was much more usual for a white man to have an affair with (and sometimes even marry) a coloured woman than it was for a white woman to have a sexual liaison with a coloured man. In most of his other foreign novels and stories, Jenkins tends to depict sexual relations between different races in those traditional terms (as in *The Expatriates*, *Leila*, and 'Imelda and the Miserly Scot'). However, Sheila McNair in *The Tiger of Gold* and Laura Johnstone in *Dust on the Paw* are exceptions to this rule. In Gorra's words, a sexual relationship between a white man and a coloured woman usually has an 'element of coercion' which demonstrates the kind of 'mastery that replicates in miniature' the relationship between empire and colony.¹² But, as Frantz Fanon argues, when 'a white woman accepts a black man there is automatically a romantic aspect ... [so that it becomes] a giving, not a seizing'.¹³ If we apply Gorra's and Fanon's arguments to the circumstances of Sheila McNair and Laura Johnstone, their love for

coloured men becomes in postcolonial terms a means by which the power of empire is undermined: it is 'a sexual union that challenges rather than confirms the power of the empire itself'.¹⁴ Jenkins's presentation of these relationships emphasises the strong opposition towards them among other British expatriates, suggesting that the British feel that their superiority as colonial masters is undermined by native appropriation of white female sexuality. Even though the two women's respective affairs take place outside the context of colonisation, the presence of the British Empire is nevertheless strong in both novels and therefore gives these love affairs an additional resonance within the context of British imperialism.

On another level, the race differences portrayed in *The Tiger of Gold* correspond with the overall contrasting picture of white people as privileged and coloured people as poor, although there are of course exceptions to this rule in characters like Chandra and Nurania's Prince Naim. This is especially relevant to the situation in India, which is clearly seen in Sheila's and the Moukes' encounters with the countless beggars who swarm the tourist attractions they visit. Sheila's high expectations of India as alluring and exotic because of its connection with Chandra, and her travel companions' expectations for adventure, are soon confused by the misery and deprivation they encounter. Their image of India as beautiful and fascinating is clearly undermined by these experiences. As Mr. Mouke points out to Sheila, as they set up for the night in a dirty hotel without lavatories, the *real* India is very different from her dreams of her golden prince: 'You been dreaming about palaces with diamond chandeliers? Well, you're going to get a look at the real India' (*TG* 127). Although Sheila is fascinated with India, she is disillusioned by the dirt and misery of the Indian poor. This disillusionment, along with her ultimate acknowledgement that she cannot marry Chandra, are important to her personal development.

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'A Far Cry From Bowmore' is the story of Hugh Macpherson, a Scottish expatriate engineer, whose staunch self-righteousness and racial prejudice are challenged and overthrown during his journey into the wild forests of Kalimantan (Borneo) to meet a dying compatriot. Macpherson's journey is by no means nearly as extensive as are McLeod's and Sheila's respective journeys in the other narratives, but while both the setting of the short story (a former British colony which has just become independent) and its length differs considerably from the other two, Macpherson is ultimately the one character who undergoes the most poignant, sudden, and unexpected transformation. In fact, Jenkins's condensed yet vivid detail in this story of thirty odd pages makes it far more arresting and ultimately moving than the two novels are, and the story is like a miniature of Jenkins's best novels in the way it deals with some of the issues closest to his heart.

Jenkins makes it clear from early in this story that Macpherson, for all his 'solid presbyterian worth' (*FC* 134), is so overly self-righteous that his moral vision has been clouded and obscured by prejudice. In the first few paragraphs of the story, the narrative focus shifts from one perspective to another, revealing Macpherson's, his wife's, and Reverend Dougary's different viewpoints on religion, life in Kalimantan, and each other. Through Dougary's perspective, we are invited to see Macpherson as a humourless, 'diligent prig', whose every action and word are controlled by '[m]oral calculations' (*FC* 135). At the same time, we learn that even though Mary Macpherson is proud of her husband's Presbyterian worth, she knows he has weaknesses, and Jenkins's irony suggests that Macpherson himself is really quite unaware of his faults while they cause distress for his wife: 'these she tried harder than he to remedy, since she suffered from them more than he did' (*FC* 134). Further, Macpherson's racial prejudice is made evident when he receives a message from McArthur, a Scottish planter in Kalimantan's interior, who is dying of cancer and wants Macpherson to visit him. On learning of McArthur and his circumstances, Macpherson is not impressed that his countryman is 'a man of substance' (*FC* 137). Rather, McArthur's marriage to a native Dusun woman immediately gives Macpherson's opinion of McArthur a negative bias: 'Macpherson went on frowning. It was none of his business, but he did not like white men marrying native women, amahs or princesses, and having half-breed children' (*FC* 137-138). Blind to his own racism, Macpherson uses religion to justify his viewpoint, convincing himself that in his condemnation of McArthur's marriage lies true compassion also: 'Instructed by Christ as well as by Jehovah, he knew that compassion must be shown in addition to disapproval' (*FC* 138).

The irony of Macpherson's moral outlook is made clear when he refuses to visit McArthur, despite his wife's appeal. Explaining his reasons to Mary, he claims that he cannot visit the dying man because he has to keep up standards, thus implying that it would degrade him to associate with people like McArthur who mix intimately with native people: '... pity's cheap, too cheap. We've got to keep up standards. Pity can lower them, you know' (*FC* 143). Macpherson's hypocrisy becomes evident when he asks whose fault it is that McArthur's wife is a native, thereby revealing the true reason for not wanting to lower his 'standards'. Convinced that he does not have colour prejudice, his own actions and words suggest the exact opposite, as is reaffirmed at other points in the story, especially when his dealing with native people through his work greatly tries his patience. It is true that Macpherson has respect for the natives as hard workers, but this is because he is driven by the Calvinist morality of giving due respect for diligence, and thus he sees the natives' work ethic as relating to his own. Yet his arrogant condescension is manifested

when an old native's refusal to leave his hovel for the building of a new carriage-way gives Macpherson 'the greatest difficulty in reminding himself that in spite of everything this was a human being, a soul capable of worshipping God, and not a decrepit animal to be kicked out of the way' (*FC* 141). It is then further suggested that Macpherson is not only blind to his own racism, but also to his own social hypocrisy. To him, Maluku the assembly man is 'the brown man in power jealous of the white man his servant but also overwhelmingly his superior' (*FC* 148). Despite Maluku's distinction as a Kalimantan official, Macpherson feels that his colour makes Maluku inferior to white Europeans. Ironically, Macpherson internally dismisses Maluku as 'a sneaky self-seeker, deserving contempt' (*FC* 149), but this is precisely what emphasises his own hypocritical self-seeking, evident in his insincere show of respect to Maluku merely because the 'way to the Directorship [a position Macpherson is hoping to get] was lined with Malukus' (*FC* 149). Macpherson's vision is clearly blurred both by racial prejudice and his own desire to advance himself professionally and socially.

Mary Macpherson is important to Jenkins's presentation of Macpherson's moral pilgrimage. Mary is portrayed as a woman of great kindness and common sense, and her attempts to change her husband's mind about McArthur reveal her charitable nature and her moral integrity. Eventually, the narrative subtly implies that Macpherson is influenced by his wife in his decision to visit McArthur, even if this is only due to his stubbornness and desire to prove himself right. By going up the river to see McArthur, Macpherson feels that he will prove it is a mistake in some way, so that his 'objections would be vindicated, [and] Mary would have to admit his judgment [*sic*] was better than hers' (*FC* 154). However, McArthur's dying effort to tell him that Mary is a bonny woman seems to reveal the reason why McArthur asked him to come, although there is an ambiguity here as to whether this is McArthur's *only* reason for wanting Macpherson's company. Despite his dismay, McArthur's words make Macpherson happy and proud, while he also realises that Mary's goodness and integrity have contributed greatly to other people's acceptance of his faults: 'McArthur had sent for him because of her; there had been many previous unacknowledged occasions when he had been welcomed, accepted, tolerated, or even liked, for her sake' (*FC* 165). Macpherson's visit to McArthur thus signals a new appreciation of Mary's good qualities and a better understanding of his own faults, and this revelation includes the admittance that 'he had never shown his love for Mary as he should' (*FC* 163).

The most central aspect of Macpherson's moral transformation is the dismantling of his racial, religious, and cultural prejudice as he arrives at McArthur's house. Expecting Mrs McArthur to be an ugly, inelegant, thick-lipped, flat-nosed and big-bellied primitive,

he is surprised and impressed by her unexpected dignity and fine looks. Thus his admission that his Mary 'did not have anything of this woman's impressive presence ... shook the very foundations of his soul' (FC 159). Obviously, meeting McArthur's wife marks a turning point in Macpherson's personal development. He feels that his mind, 'with its ballast of principles and beliefs, had broken loose and was beginning to drift' (FC 159), and as he enters the McArthurs' magnificent house, he has a growing feeling of 'light-headedness ...[and] light-heartedness' (FC 161). The hospitality shown him leaves him feeling 'deeply moved' (FC 161), and he realises that McArthur's invitation had not been a pathetic 'whine for help' but the bestowing of a great honour on himself (FC 162). Looking at wooden carvings of head-hunters in the McArthurs' house, his former disgust and horror at the headhunting practise is now mixed with 'uneasy wonder' as he dimly perceives 'that there were aspects and areas of faith that he had not known existed' (FC 162).

In the intense final pages of the story, therefore, Macpherson's former prejudice is gradually dispelled. Jenkins's poignant juxtaposition of Macpherson's religion with native custom drives home more forcefully the transformation that takes place. The native gongs sounding outside McArthur's house to keep evil spirits away contribute greatly to Macpherson's new understanding as, sitting beside McArthur's deathbed, he suddenly realises that his New Testament 'was to him what the gongs were to the natives' (FC 163). His thoughts and feelings at this point are significant, and suggest that Macpherson has here recognised the full extent of his weaknesses: 'He felt for them a respect he had never been capable of before, and for himself a pity that he had never thought he needed' (FC 163). He is finally able to see beauty and meaning in things that before he judged as heathenish ignorance, and his prejudice is thereby swept away by a sudden insight into and respect for a culture he has hitherto made no effort to understand. He now sees that his former disapproval of native people and their customs was 'for no reason except that ... [their] way of life, ... appearance, ... religion, ... people, ... [and] food, were different' from his own (FC 166).

A review of *A Far Cry From Bowmore & Other Stories* maintains that in Macpherson's case, an 'inherent national character is transformed by the East, [and] the character becomes a new man'.¹⁵ Furthermore, Edwin Morgan summarises the story as showing 'the loveless and prejudiced Presbyterian rectitude of a Scottish engineer being broken into at last by pagan funeral gongs and the dignity of a Malaysian woman at the death bed of her Scottish husband'.¹⁶ Indeed, Macpherson's last gesture as he touches his New Testament in order to assist the 'pagan shrieks and gongs' that are set off as McArthur dies (FC 166), shows that a great transformation has taken place in his character.

His racial prejudice has been overthrown by the illuminating experience of his journey, and he has gained a new insight into the native culture of the country in which he lives. 'A Far Cry From Bowmore' therefore ends on a very positive note, although Jenkins also leaves it open whether Macpherson's transformation will be lasting. Macpherson's moral confrontation and ultimate transformation reveal him as a most obvious variant of Jenkins's many pilgrims of conscience.

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In their *Themes and Motifs in Western Literature*, Horst and Ingrid Daemmrich explain the symbolic meaning of the journey motif:

The theme of the journey has been widely used in literature as a means for self-exploration. This function presupposes that movement away from the familiar and predictable to the new and unpredictable is paralleled by an inner transformation that will ultimately result in individual development and self-knowledge.¹⁷

Daemmrich's definition of the journey as a literary motif clearly applies to how Jenkins uses the actual journeys of John McLeod, Sheila McNair, and Hugh Macpherson in *Some Kind of Grace*, *The Tiger of Gold*, and 'A Far Cry From Bowmore'. Albeit in different degrees, all journeys signify the personal development of the protagonist and bring him or her to a final revelation of some kind. McLeod's visions of grace, Sheila's encounter with India's beauty and misery, along with her final relinquishment of her romantic dreams, and Macpherson's transformation from bigotry and prejudice to cultural understanding, all these are the end result of physical travel across regions and countries. McLeod's, Sheila's, and Macpherson's journeys towards moral and social understanding place them alongside other pilgrims of conscience in Jenkins's fiction whose experience brings them towards greater self-knowledge.

Endnotes

- ¹ Glenda Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark', Ph.D., University of Edinburgh, 1985, 208.
- ² Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978) 277.
- ³ *ibid* 285.
- ⁴ Personal Interview 21.
- ⁵ In 1838-42, 1878-80, and 1919 respectively. The British waged these wars to 'establish control and contain the encroaching power of Russia'. The first of these conflicts ended with the humiliating defeat of the British forces, losing almost 20,000 soldiers during the retreat. See *The History Today Companion to British History*, eds. Juliet Gardiner & Neil Wenborn (London: Collins & Brown, 1995) 6-7.
- ⁶ This aspect of the novel also echoes Stevenson, but in 'The Beach of Falesá', Wiltshire decides against taking his half-caste children back to Europe because of the prejudice they would be subjected to there.
- ⁷ Sheila's trip to India with an American family is based on Jenkins's daughter's trip there with the family of her American friend, whose father was a devout Mormon. From an unpublished part of Personal Interview, 21 March 1997.
- ⁸ 'All that glitters', rev. of *The Tiger of Gold*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 25 May 1962: 377.
- ⁹ Hart 277.
- ¹⁰ Ainslie T. Embree, 'Imagining India: English-language fiction set in post-independence India', *Asia in Western Fiction*, eds. Robin W. Winks and James R. Rush (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990) 74.
- ¹¹ Michael Gorra, *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 48.
- ¹² *ibid* 48.
- ¹³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967) 46.
- ¹⁴ Gorra 48.
- ¹⁵ 'Scots sounds', rev. of *A Far Cry From Bowmore & Other Stories*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 6 July 1972: 769.
- ¹⁶ Edwin Morgan, *Essays* (Cheadle Hulme: Carcanet, 1974) 245.
- ¹⁷ Horst S. and Ingrid Daemmrich, *Themes and Motifs in Western Literature: A Handbook* (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1987) 157.

Chapter 3:

Eastern Visions: *Dust on the Paw* (1961) and *The Holy Tree* (1969)

While *Dust on the Paw* and *The Holy Tree* are Jenkins's only foreign novels in which there are no Scottish main characters, these novels also differ from his other work by focusing predominantly on native Eastern protagonists. Abdul Wahab of *Dust on the Paw* and Michael Eking of *The Holy Tree* are both driven by fierce ambition and hopes for their country's intellectual, scientific, and political progress. They are characterised by their paradoxical sense of moral and social value, engaging with themselves and the world through a curious mix of naivety and cunning. In his portrayal of these characters, Jenkins explores the discrepancy between idealism and practice, human corruptibility and hypocrisy, and the limits of human moral ability. His portrayal of other central characters, such as Harold Moffatt in *Dust on the Paw*, underlines the centrality of these concerns further while also bringing into prominence the issue of cultural and racial conflict, especially in the context of mixed marriages and sexual relations between races. Arguably the most important of Jenkins's foreign novels, *Dust on the Paw* and *The Holy Tree* are crucial to the overall assessment of Jenkins's work. Both novels draw on aspects of Eastern political history, and share subtle reference to Western influence in the East, questioning the moral values of Western ideology and its relevance to the countries it has been imposed on.

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In some ways, *Dust on the Paw* is a sequel to the more straightforward adventure story *Some Kind of Grace*, but the issue of the impending marriage between an Afghan and a British woman is mentioned towards the end of the earlier novel. *Dust on the Paw* is also a forerunner to the less successful *The Tiger of Gold*, which features a similarly satiric approach to expatriate lives in Afghanistan and presents many of the characters from the former novel, such as Lady Beaully and Howard Winfield. Set in Afghanistan¹ during a period of cultural revolution and political reform, *Dust on the Paw* deals with a great international mix of characters, and reaches its climax at 'Jeshan' (the annual celebration of Afghan independence) when the shaddry—the robes and veil worn by Afghan women—is abolished. The story focuses on two sets of relationships: firstly, that of the Afghan Abdul Wahab, a patriotic and idealistic scientist, with his handicapped and determined British fiancée, Laura Johnstone; and secondly, that of the British teacher, poet, and idealist Harold Moffat with his beautiful, dignified and artistic Chinese wife, Lan. While these two relationships are pictured as parallel or mirrored situations, they reflect further Jenkins's ambiguous exploration of the pitfalls of moral and social idealism, the ironies of

love, and the various complications of inter-racial marriages. At the same time, the general portrayal of the British expatriate community along with Jenkins's vivid and convincing description of Afghan life comprise a truly colourful and wide-ranging canvas of character, theme, and plot.

In Bernard Sellin's words, *Dust on the Paw* is 'a large-scale, elaborate examination of the buffer zone between two alien cultures',² and I would further suggest that it is the most sophisticated and complex of Jenkins's Eastern novels. Although an early review of the book criticises Jenkins for blurring his narrative with 'somewhat stilted, wordy prose', it praises his portrayal of the Afghans.³ In later years, the novel has been highly praised by critics. Hart describes it as 'a large, handsomely formed book, and ... Jenkins's most ambitious achievement',⁴ Norquay classifies it as by far the 'most ambitious work' of Jenkins's foreign period,⁵ and Gifford perceives it as being 'representative of the very best of Scottish and English fiction'.⁶ More specifically, critics' discussion of *Dust on the Paw* has placed Jenkins on equal footing with major British novelists such as E. M. Forster and Graham Greene.⁷ Indeed, Jenkins's depiction of racial division in *Dust on the Paw* is reminiscent of Forster's *A Passage to India*, especially in the context of inter-racial liaisons. Both novels show that sexual relationships (or the possibility of these) between a coloured man and a white woman are a particularly vulnerable issue, and that sexual advances (or the assumption of this) by an Eastern man upon a Western woman is considered highly offensive and threatening. For instance, the readiness shown on behalf of British expatriates to believe that Wahab insulted Helga Larsen clearly echoes the kind of racial assumption shown in the situation surrounding the Marabar Caves incident in *A Passage to India*.⁸ Further, the reaction shown by the British community in *Dust on the Paw* to Wahab's intention of marrying Laura Johnstone indicates that they do not consider coloured men worthy of white women's affection, and thus reveals their essential racism.

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The title of *Dust on the Paw* is significant to Jenkins's treatment of morality in the story, and this is made evident by the prescript to the novel: '*According to the eleventh century Persian poet, Firdausi, the powerful ones of the earth were the lion's paw, and the humble the dust on it. In some places it is no different today*' (DOP, prescript). While the quotation from Firdausi⁹ symbolises more basic aspects of the plot, like the general division of Afghans into the powerful (and corrupt), and the humble, the title is also significant when the character of Wahab and the broader subject of Jenkins's moral perspective are taken into account. The title of the novel indicates how power can be unequally distributed between individuals, but it clearly gives precedence to the humble. This aspect of the title underlines one of Jenkins's central moral concerns: the importance of humility in a world of greed, selfishness, power manipulation, and unfair distribution of

wealth. While presenting humility as a valuable virtue, Jenkins nevertheless stresses that human nature makes humility difficult to achieve.¹⁰ In accordance with this, the image of the dust becomes an important symbol throughout the novel, like when the schoolboys under Wahab's care bend and rub their hands in the dust during a patriotic demonstration at Isban College (*DOP* 355). In this scene, the schoolboys see patriotism as ennobled by humility.

On the other hand, although '*Dust on the Paw*' suggests the importance of the *dust* on the lion's paw, it also makes clear that dust and lion need each other and are interrelated concepts. It is in Abdul Wahab that Jenkins brings both dust and lion together. Living in poverty and degradation one moment, and holding a position of power the next, Wahab is in essence both dust and lion. Wahab, educated in England and a teacher of science at Isban College, is one of Jenkins's more interesting and ambivalent characters, and his constant doubtfulness and self-questioning make him yet another pilgrim of conscience. Wahab is described thus by Norquay:

[He is] a man who continually ponders the nature of truth itself as well as the paradoxes of morality, [but] he nevertheless maintains a keen awareness of the necessity of deceit and of the propensity which compels him towards immorality.¹¹

The complexities of Wahab's moral outlook are consistently emphasised. He is 'intense, introspective and awkward',¹² and on many occasions he shows glimpses of ironical self-knowledge and an awareness of the transitory nature of human ideals. This is nowhere better demonstrated than in his personal development, as his ambitions for social advancement often clash with his ideals for a better Afghanistan. He wants to help liberate Afghanistan from backward and fundamental Islamic influences, which keep it 'imprisoned in ignorance, disease, hunger, and stupidity' (*DOP* 118). However, Wahab realises that power and influence could corrupt him: 'It was ... quite possible that he too, if he ever rose to eminence, might not use his opportunities for the betterment of his country but rather for his own' (*DOP* 127). The paradoxical nature of Wahab's perspective makes him an extremely ambiguous and complex character, so that Harold Moffatt's description of him as a 'complicated idealist' (*DOP* 253) becomes perhaps the most appropriate way to define him. At the same time, it could be said that he is both an innocent idealist and a deceitful opportunist. He experiences plunges from 'selfless idealism to cunning self-interest' (*DOP* 190), and he keeps questioning his true motives in circumstances such as those concerning his relationship with Laura and his own advancement into the position of College Principal. His faith in his own ideals moreover fluctuates: believing in them at one moment, he sees them as futile the next, comparing the hopelessness of idealism to the flogging of a dead donkey (*DOP* 121).

Introduced by Mussein, the retiring principal of Isban College, when Wahab takes over his position, the Firdausi quotation on which Jenkins bases his title first of all points towards the difference between Mussein and Wahab. Wahab argues:

‘...why blame me because you have been removed from the Principalship? It isn’t Abdul Wahab who has taken your place, Mussein; it is a scientist, a man of the modern world.’

For a few moments Mussein could find no answer. ‘Well,’ he said at last, ‘at least poetry can teach us to be humble.’

‘But we do not want to be humble, Mussein. We have been humble much too long.’

‘There is a line from Firdausi, Wahab, which has often comforted me. “I am dust on the paw of the lion.”’

Wahab frowned: he had not expected so heroic a line. ‘Be dust as you wish, Mussein; but do not protest when others prefer to be the lion.’ (*DOP* 226)

As Mussein finds comfort in humility, Wahab is pleased with his own rise to power. In these terms, the title posits a symbol for the two men’s respective positions. Despite his ambitions, however, Wahab has difficulties staying altogether fixed in the role of the lion. Trying to act magnanimously as befits the suddenly powerful, he nevertheless has to acknowledge his faltering confidence: ‘The lion’s tail, as a matter of fact, just wouldn’t stay taut and proudly curled; no, it kept wanting to droop and trail in the dust’ (*DOP* 227). The quote emphasises the paradox of Wahab’s perspective. While the lion’s position holds more attraction, Wahab has to admit the precariousness of his newly acquired power. As a consequence, he even feels envious of the dust on his shoes at one point, because ‘To be the lion’s paw meant prowling and pouncing dangerously, and meeting in conflict other lions, older and fiercer’ (*DOP* 228). As a champion of the future of Afghanistan, Wahab cannot afford to be humble or weak, but this is nevertheless what he sometimes yearns for: ‘he wished that he were there, a simple man in a simple village, pleased to find his plot of land turn green twice in the season’ (*DOP* 249). For Wahab, to live a simple life of humble wants would mean the absence ‘of the rank stink of power’ (*DOP* 250), and thus social responsibility and moral culpability would be altogether avoided. The conflict between social ambition, on one hand, and the knowledge of his own corruptibility, on the other, is therefore central to Wahab’s development in the novel, and reflects further the symbolic significance of Jenkins’s title.

The title is also important when examining Jenkins’s portrayal of Wahab as a symbol of Afghanistan. There are many instances in the narrative where Wahab is referred to as representing Afghanistan, and it seems fitting that Moffatt, a complex and self-deluding university teacher, mockingly refers to Wahab as ‘the soul of Afghanistan’ in the midst of his animosity towards the Afghan (*DOP* 151). Not surprisingly, Jenkins gives this sarcastic comment a deeper resonance in relation to Wahab’s role as an Afghan.

Investigating Moffatt's false allegation that Wahab insulted the American-Swedish Helga Larsen, the Moslem mullah Mojedaji claims that Wahab 'in a way represents his country. He is young, eager, educated, patriotic. It may not be too fanciful to say that if he fails, Afghanistan fails too' (*DOP* 171). Although Wahab's ambitions for his country are based on his modern outlook and desire to see Afghanistan progress towards a more Western ideal, he feels that his own feebleness, corruptibility, and deceit are manifestations of Afghan backwardness. In this sense, his inner struggle represents the conflict between the old and new Afghanistan, as suggested in his reflections: 'Were the new and old forces, tug-o'-warring for his country's soul, using him as a rope? Often these days he did feel as if he were being pulled apart' (*DOP* 190). Wahab's identification with Afghanistan carries a sense of the pattern of weak and mighty which is reflected in the Firdausi quote, especially when viewed against the much more scientifically advanced Western powers which still have considerable influence in the East. Thus Wahab points out his humiliation to Alan Wint after attending a British party on a false invitation: 'To treat me as if I did not matter, as if I were of as little consequence as a donkey, as if I was dust on the lion's paw, is therefore to treat most of my nation as such' (*DOP* 256). Wahab may be inadequate, fallible, and feeble, and thus symbolise his country's backwardness, but he is also a proud man who loves his country and thereby represents his nation's refusal to be humiliated by Western people accepting its hospitality and employment.

Wahab is both cunning and naively idealistic; he manipulates other people to his own ends while longing for a better society where poverty, greed, and ignorance do not exist. At the same time, he experiences intense moments of self-recognition and insight into human nature. For example, telling his family about Laura's arrival, their outrage at his intention to move to a new house without taking them with him makes him compare them to wolves. Wahab's rationalising of this comparison carries a clear emphasis on the beastly nature of man:

He raised his hand, and for another moment their teeth, already bared, were kept from his throat. These are, he reminded himself again, my people ... not only are they of the same race as myself, they are of the same blood. Why then do I persist in likening them to wolves? It is not enough to answer glibly that wolves too are Afghan ... No, the reason is more fundamental: in the human heart, after thousands of years of civilization and religion, brutish selfishness still reigns.

The verdict of course condemned him too; they who savagely demanded were wolfish, he who tenaciously refused was wolfish too. With everyone involved there seemed no remedy. (*DOP* 305-306)

Wahab consistently transposes his own weaknesses onto all of humanity. While he perceives himself as 'an imperfect lover of his fellow men' (*DOP* 240), he is nevertheless depressed about the essential fallibility of mankind. For Wahab, his own propensity for

evil means that evil is part of everyone. Planning his revenge on Moffatt with Dr Habbibullah, his own spitefulness saddens him, not for his own sake, but because of the universal relevance of his faults:

... this spite, selfishness, and treachery which he was displaying were bearable only if he felt that they were restricted to himself; to be reminded that they were probably in every man, and therefore were throughout the world in colossal abundance was terrifying and intolerable.

[...]

Though Wahab nodded and smiled, he not only hated but was afraid of himself. If he was capable of such evil, all those many millions were also. (DOP 358-359)

Wahab's idealism means that he expects much of himself, but when his best intentions fail him, his self-awareness gives him insight into the essential imperfections and weaknesses of humanity. Wahab's perspective is therefore central to Jenkins's overall moral perspective, since Jenkins's fiction emphasises throughout how greed, selfishness, spite, and other negative attributes are inherent to and inseparable from human nature.

While Wahab's participation in the Brotherhood—a society of Afghan men who plan political reform and the abolishment of the shaddry—and his sudden rise to power are essential to his development, in that they challenge Wahab to recognise his own fallibility and its universal implications, his relationship with Laura Johnstone is also relevant to Jenkins's portrayal of Wahab in particular and his exploration of human nature in general. Wahab questions his feelings for Laura constantly, as well as his motives for wanting to marry her. His expectations of their impending union waver between confidence and insecurity; one moment, he believes Laura will strengthen and benefit his new career, and the next moment he sees her as a hindrance. Simultaneously, while Wahab is shown to genuinely love Laura, her Western origin and the whiteness of her skin are part of his reasons for wanting her. He admits that colour is 'a matter of prestige' in Afghanistan (DOP 234), visualising his future children as having blue eyes, and dreaming of walking in the Kabul bazaars showing off his wife's fair skin. Through Wahab, therefore, Jenkins emphasises the prominence of colour-consciousness and racial discrimination. Because of the supremacy of West over East and white over coloured during imperial times, the Eastern and coloured population themselves see white colour as superior.¹³ Issues of race and colour are a further aspect of Jenkins's juxtaposition of Wahab's situation with Harold Moffatt's, as discussed below.

Wahab's story demonstrates yet again that love is never perfect, and always tinged with negative human attributes such as selfishness, avarice, and jealousy. At the same time, love is clearly presented as a true power of transfiguration. The ultimate suggestion of *Dust on the Paw* is that Wahab and Laura will succeed in their relationship. In this

sense, the story of Abdul Wahab ends on a positive note. He has realised the fullness of his love for Laura and decided to cherish it no matter what its flaws. The relationship of Wahab and Laura also has positive overtones because theirs is a union of different races, which compares favourably with other such cases in the novel, that of Mrs Mohebzada in particular. The novel's conclusion, presented through the perspective of Alan Wint, a British diplomat, represents a positiveness on the issue of mixed marriage from a Western viewpoint. On seeing Wahab taking Laura's hand at the Jeshan celebrations, Wint imagines that Wahab is going to run with his fiancée along one of the 'many exciting, unexplored, sunlit roads leading to opportunities of fulfillment [*sic*]' (*DOP* 384). For Jenkins, reaching beyond the boundaries of social convention can perhaps lead the way to self-discovery and happiness.

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The paradox of idealism and practice is further emphasised in Harold Moffatt, whose development complements Wahab's moral questioning. The case of British Mrs Mohebzada is important to Moffatt's actions in the novel. Kept more or less a prisoner by her Moslem husband's family, Mrs Mohebzada is so miserable that she finally leaves her husband at the cost of leaving their child behind in his care. Moffatt uses this tragedy to explain his fervent opposition against Wahab's intended marriage to Laura. His strong objection to the marriage is shown on several occasions in the early stages of the narrative, and his dislike of Wahab culminates when he throws whisky in the Afghan's face during a party at the Moffatts' house. It soon becomes evident, though, that Moffatt's motives are not straightforward and not really sprung from his concern for Mrs Mohebzada and Laura, but rather from his own doubts and fears about his marriage to Chinese Lan, and in particular from his refusal to have children of mixed colour. Despite his championing of racial equality, his professed respect for Afghan customs and values, and his own mixed marriage, it thus emerges that Moffatt is tormented by hidden colour prejudice and the fear of having half-caste children. That he is racist at heart, and that this lies at the centre of his dilemma, is suggested through his wife's insightful perspective: 'by gibing so bitterly against racial prejudice, Moffatt more than helped to keep it in existence; he also kept himself infected with it. His rage against poor Mohebzada was really against himself, so polluted' (*DOP* 38).

This aspect of Moffatt's character shows the discrepancy between moral principle and social behaviour, an inconsistency which is explored throughout Jenkins's writing. As with Charlie Forbes in *The Changeling*, Moffatt's imperfections betray his ideals, and this fact emphasises the limitations and pitfalls of idealism. Moffatt is aware of the paradox inherent in his refusal to have children, seeing this as 'absurdly against what he had always professed, and indeed had observed: that the most beautiful and interesting children were

of mixed parentage' (*DOP* 66). Further, he has to admit that he harbours an 'unreasonable and inexplicable hatred' of Wahab (*DOP* 66). Indeed, the passion with which Moffatt opposes Wahab's intended marriage suggests that Moffatt subconsciously perceives Wahab and Laura as the embodiment of his own problems. Moffatt's resentment against Wahab echoes the recurrent projection of personal insecurities and bitterness onto the scapegoat in Jenkins's work, as seen, for example, in Duror's hatred of Calum in *The Cone-Gatherers* and in Constance Kilgour's cruelty towards her daughter in *Love is a Fervent Fire*. As Lan suggests, Moffatt sees in Wahab's and Laura's future union a manifestation of the mistake he has made by marrying a woman of a different race. At the same time, the Moffatts' marriage is a mistake only because Moffatt cannot escape his colour prejudice: his 'dark essence is his hidden racism'.¹⁴ The many discrepancies between Moffatt's openly proclaimed principles, on one hand, and his actions, on the other, underline this aspect of his character. For example, his attempt to persuade the Minister of Education to refuse Laura Johnstone a visa to enter Afghanistan shows Moffatt acting in direct opposition to his professed campaign for social and racial equality, and against his own notions of human decency.

On another level, Moffatt's relationship with his wife, and her unconventional character, are important to his predicament. Described by Fairgrieve as 'a superior, aloof, goddess-like figure',¹⁵ Lan is not entirely accepted by the expatriate community, although she is admired by most for her charming, kind, and artistic nature. She is presented as a paragon of integrity and strength, but the narrative also implies that she is a martyr to Moffatt's hidden racism. Most importantly, her exotic beauty and her spiritual distinction are a source of joy as well as torment for Moffatt. While Moffatt loves and admires Lan for her delicate beauty and for her many qualities, her essential goodness and her different colour also combine to remind him painfully of his own moral frailties. Thus he finds himself 'tormented by his love as by an enemy who knew him profoundly', so that '[h]is weakness and unworthiness were cruelly revealed' (*DOP* 72). Lan does not agree with her husband's opposition to Wahab; rather, she takes Wahab's part against Moffatt in the early stages of the story. It is this which seems to threaten their marriage, but the real reason lies in Moffatt's refusal to acknowledge the failure of his principles, revealed more painfully to him through Lan's championing of Wahab's cause. This is what Gillie, the Consul whom everyone considers pompous and obtuse, realises: 'She [Lan] was ... a poem which had gone wrong, which could never be finished and which represented the falseness of so many of his [Moffatt's] previous high-minded declarations' (*DOP* 99). Moffatt is not willing to admit this falseness, but instead sees the only possible remedy for his marriage in the devaluation of Lan's moral integrity. Rather than facing up to his failure, he wants Lan to

abandon her stand for justice and lower herself morally by supporting him: '... if those efforts [to prevent Laura from marrying Wahab] involved him in degradation which Lan was willing to share with him, perhaps they might be able to keep going, having made the necessary adjustments to the world's level' (*DOP* 101). In his view, if Lan would thus lower her moral standards, she would merely prove herself human: 'She need not become different, she need only degenerate to a level that, being human, she had in her; she would find him there' (*DOP* 103).

Ultimately, this is what Lan is forced to do in order to save their marriage, and while her abandonment of Wahab's cause marks a turning point in that it is only after this that Moffatt agrees to have children and becomes friendly with Wahab, betraying her principles also means that Lan is no longer perceived by others as a priestess or 'an idol in a temple' (*DOP* 200). Importantly, the lowering of Lan's moral standards has brought her the acceptance and liking of other people. Showing herself human, and fallible, she is no longer a threat to their self-perception. This is what Moffatt realises, while simultaneously regretting that her spiritual distinction and serenity are lost:

She had slipped off as neatly as a snake its skin her former imperturbable charitableness, and in its place had quickly grown this promptness to judge and lack of reluctance to condemn. She had gone further: toward people malicious towards her she was prepared to show in return a malice more intelligent and therefore more effective than theirs. She had decided to become like the people among whom she lived, and so, though she gained in companionableness, she had certainly lost in distinction. ... She laughed oftener and more loudly, but that secret smile which had seemed to him to have concentrated in it so much mystery, beauty, and compassion, was now seldom seen. Her friends, more at ease in her presence, liked her better, and he himself supposed that on balance it was preferable to have this shrewd, ready-witted, popular woman as his wife than the enigmatic priestess; but he would be haunted for the rest of his life by that lost serenity. (*DOP* 319-320)

Once again, issues central to Jenkins's treatment of human morality are emphasised. As with many other isolated figures in Jenkins's fiction, Lan's enigmatic, serene presence, and her spiritual distinction, have been sustained merely by her refusal to compromise. Comparable with Rutherford in *The Thistle and the Grail*, her refusal to make concessions, and the apparent absence of moral fallibility, results in social isolation. As soon as Lan has shown herself capable of being malicious and judgmental, she has shown herself to exist on the same level as the rest. This idea is central to Jenkins's moral questioning, and, with very few exceptions, such as Gavin Hamilton of *A Would-Be Saint*, Jenkins's characters are eventually shown to either accept their fallibility or comply with what society considers 'normal' moral behaviour.

The Holy Tree, arguably Jenkins's most 'postcolonial' novel, has a narrower scope of characters than *Dust on the Paw*, and at first sight appears more straightforward in that it has less in the way of sub-plots and what would appear to be a simple central theme. It is set in the former British colony of Kalimantan (Sabah / Northern Borneo), and centres around political tension and the receding power of Britain in the face of Kalimantan's forthcoming independence. Jenkins's colourful evocation of the ethnic variety of Kalimantan, along with his ironic depiction of the British expatriate community, emphasises how racial prejudice and cultural tension have been created by the consistent aggression and exploitation of colonialists, in this case both the Chinese and the British. Furthermore, *The Holy Tree* is Jenkins's only Borneo story which has a Borneo aborigine for a protagonist. Michael Eking, a Dusun¹⁶ boy of nineteen, dreams of getting a college education and thus escape the poverty and ignorance of his village kampong, while also enthusiastic to learn and acquire the ways and habits of the West. When Michael is refused a place at Api College, despite his intelligence and success in the Primary Six examination, his desperate ambition leads him to betray political rebels, one of them his brother, to the police, with the result that he is allowed a place at the College. Michael's journey from frustrated and thwarted love of learning, to the hard-bought fulfilment of his ambition, and finally to his death under what he has designated as his holy tree, reveals once more Jenkins's preoccupation with human morality and fallibility. Within this frame, concepts such as innocence and betrayal are important to the novel's moral dimension. Michael himself, though in essence different from many of Jenkins's moral pilgrims, is ultimately driven to acknowledge his isolation and to admit the treachery, unfairness, and arrogance that has characterised his treatment of his own people. At the same time, his eventual fate echoes other instances in Jenkins's fiction where premature death carries sacrificial overtones, implying perhaps a kind of atonement.

Hardly any criticism of *The Holy Tree* exists, with the exception of an anonymous *TLS* review of 1969¹⁷ and Hart's discussion, where he argues that Michael Eking is another of the line of changelings in Jenkins's fiction, a changeling who 'fails to survive'.¹⁸ Further, Hart suggests that the holy tree of the title recalls Katherine Anne Porter's *Flowering Judas* (1940). Indeed, Michael is in some ways comparable to young characters in Jenkins's earlier fiction, such as Sam Gourlay of *Happy for the Child* (1953) and Tom Curdie of *The Changeling* (1958), who are victims of their unfair societies, and who—albeit in different ways—long to escape the impoverishment and squalor of their environment. What separates Michael from Gourlay and Curdie is that he is given a chance (however morally suspect the means by which it is given) to escape his background and advance himself. And although Hart does not specifically explicate the connection

between Jenkins's and Porter's stories, his observation is justified in light of Jenkins's symbolic use of the holy tree. This echoes Porter's evocation of the flowering Judas tree as an epitome of guilt and betrayal in the title story of her book, while the many references to Michael as Judas further reflect the central themes of Porter's story.¹⁹ In general terms, Jenkins and Porter both employ religious allusion and startling symbolism to underline their concern with innocence, corruptibility, and betrayal.

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As with *Dust on the Paw*, the title of *The Holy Tree* carries a strong, symbolic meaning. The image of a holy tree became imprinted on Jenkins's mind when he was a child and passed a tree near Flemington which had an iron cross nailed to it,²⁰ and trees are a strong presence in Jenkins's fiction, as, for instance, in *The Cone-Gatherers*. Moreover, trees are often given a spiritual or religious significance in Jenkins's work, as when Calum's death in a tree in *The Cone-Gatherers* is implicitly linked with Christian ideas of sacrifice and redemption. The assassination of Michael under his holy tree echoes this kind of symbolic allusion by Jenkins. Dying under the holy tree implies revenge for Michael's betrayal of his brother and the rebels, while arguably also representing a kind of atonement for his rejection of his family and culture.

In *The Holy Tree* Jenkins blends religious symbolism with primitive belief in tree-spirits and demons, transposing this onto the setting of Borneo and creating a protagonist through whom a native fear of trees and spirits is revealed early in the story:

Not far from the kampong was an enormous tree, with thick branches that sprawled almost from the ground up and up and up to claw at the sky. ... Pieces of coloured rag were always to be seen tied to it, for it was believed to be inhabited by a spirit that, if not propitiated by such gifts, would kill anyone passing, especially at night. One evening, as darkness was falling, Michael found himself under it, his dictionary clutched in his hand as a protection. (HT 58)

In her 1897 study of the sacred tree, J. H. Philpot briefly mentions the Dayak belief in tree spirits, and the fact that even at 'the present day they frequently make offerings to the tree-dwelling spirits, and hang gifts on any tree whose deity they desire to propitiate'.²¹ It seems likely that this was still in practise when Jenkins worked in Borneo, and even today, the tying of coloured rags to trees is a custom in some Eastern countries.²² Jenkins may also be remembering that even in Scotland the act of nailing or attaching a piece of rag to trees beside holy wells is still known.²³ In *The Holy Tree*, this sort of propitiation or sacrifice is of great importance, evident in Michael Eking's first perception of the hostel tree as having spiritual significance. The following quote demonstrates how Jenkins draws on both Christian and pagan ideology:

... where the road climbed steeply up to the hostel stood a huge flame-of-the-forest tree. Many of its flowers had fallen on to the grass and roadway

like great blobs of blood. It seemed to Michael that the spirit of Father McBride's God [Jesus], whose body could be seen in the church, had now come to inhabit this tree and would remain there all the time Michael was at the College, to look after and protect him. He imagined he saw it descending out of the blue sky, with wings white as clouds. He would have to come often in the dark to nail to the trunk pieces of coloured cloth or even pages of his dictionary. This tree as a holy place would be his alone. He would not need the school doctor to heal his leg; all he would have to do would be to take one of those waxy red flowers and press it against the sores. (*HT* 142-143)

Obviously, the blood-red flowers symbolically foreshadow Michael's eventual death under the tree, representing his blood as he is stabbed to death by his assassin. The novel's ultimate irony lies in the fact that Michael is eventually betrayed by the holy tree, as it becomes the perfect hiding place for his murderer. His faith in its protective power is therefore misconceived.

The holy tree achieves enormous significance within the narrative. Not only does it become Michael's private solace, where he goes almost every day to thank what he believes is a beneficent god, but it also becomes a complex symbol of Michael's inner development and of his role as Judas. Michael's naïve belief in the protective power of the tree is countered by a disturbing reference to it as monument of his guilt in betraying Azad and the rebels, as well as of his betrayal of his own culture. This is the dream that Michael has of Mary Reynolds, in which sexual fulfilment, violence, and odour combine to symbolise his subconscious guilt. The dream clearly juxtaposes Michael's desire to have sex with his teacher with images from his exchange with the rebels:

More than once he woke, trying to recall a dream, always the same one, in which, naked as a flower, she [Mary Reynolds] led him by the hand through empty streets to a house beside a great tree red with flowers; there, on a bed smelling of perfume he made love to her. Still and ugly in his hand was a revolver, and just at the climax he shot her. Her blood gushed out of her heart, branching over her belly and down her thighs. As she lay dying, a stink of gangrene rose from her, visible as vapour from the road after rain, and she had wailed the song 'This old man', which he had sung in the jungle to let Khamis know he was coming. (*HT* 158-159)

Michael feels guilty about his desire for an Englishwoman because he knows instinctively that the culture she represents, and which he wants to adopt as his own, is morally rotten, as suggested by her stinking of gangrene. In order to assuage his guilt, he shoots her, while her singing an English song, which Michael has used to gain his brother's recognition and trust, further emphasises his underlying sense of guilt for having betrayed his people and his culture for a morally corrupt Western ideology.

*

Michael Eking is one of Jenkins's intriguing and equivocal creations, naïve yet deceitful, child-like yet worldly, dedicated yet treacherous. By juxtaposing different and varying

narrative perspectives in the novel, Jenkins emphasises the moral ambiguity of Michael's character and actions, so that the reader can never quite determine whether to condemn or condone his betrayal of Azad and the rebels. While it seems deplorable that he informs on his own brother, it is made clear that Michael is not driven by material greed, but by the desire to be educated, and this fact arguably makes him worthy of some sympathy. Furthermore, Michael's enthusiasm for becoming 'Westernised', which, by implication, includes becoming morally corrupt, adds a satiric slant to Jenkins's treatment of colonisation. Michael's desire for self-improvement is presented as a naïve belief that if he learns English, he will become an important member of his society as well as wealthy and powerful. Because of this, his longing for education is 'a hunger, a greed, an obsession' (*HT* 11) rather than genuine intellectual ambition. Through his portrayal of Michael, Jenkins questions whether Western ideology is not guilty of moral decadence among its more positive values of democracy and freedom of speech. Michael's equating wealth, influence and power with immorality—echoing certain aspects of Wahab's thinking in *Dust on the Paw*—and the fact that in making this assumption he thinks of British colonialists as role models, suggests that his moral perceptions have been heavily influenced as well as distorted by the British presence in Kalimantan. In this sense, we can read Michael as a victim of Western imperialism. The imposition of British values has left an indelible mark on Kalimantan society and character, demonstrated most poignantly in the misguided notions of Michael, who, in Hart's words, is 'caught in a postcolonial social web'.²⁴

Michael is first introduced through the prejudiced Mr Chin, headmaster of St Philomena's Primary School. To attend school, Michael has walked fourteen miles every week-day for years, but now he has been denied a place in Api College, despite his high marks in the primary examination. Michael comes from an extremely poor background, is dirty and dressed in rags. His determination to learn, and his frustration at this rejection, are clear from the start, even when presented through the biased viewpoint of Chin. It is obvious that Chin, Chinese himself, sees the Dusuns as uncivilised, primitive, and pagan, and as his inferiors. To him, they are a 'people without history or culture, descendants of headhunters' (*HT* 13). Even so, Chin's opinion of the youngster as 'selfishly remote and bad-tempered' (*HT* 9) is later shown to have some basis. Chin's perspective suggests that Michael is in some ways a victim of his own naïve intellect as well as of unfair treatment by the education system. Chin's own unjustness is revealed by the fact that he has 'personally gone over his [Michael's] examination papers and deducted marks, on the incontestable grounds that so dangerous a pagan ought not to be rewarded by a Christian school' (*HT* 9). Moreover, it seems that Michael has been denied a place at the College by

the educational authorities because his brother joined in ‘the so-called democratic armed rebellion’ against the Sultan in neighbouring Runebi (HT 10).²⁵

Despite this reading of Michael as a kind of victim—of his own folly, the education system, and colonialism—he is certainly not an innocent in the normal sense of the word. He has had sexual relations on many occasions with a girl from his village, he lusts after Mary Reynolds, a British teacher at the College, and, as he visits Mr Elphin, it becomes clear that he knows and accepts the irregularities of human nature, in this case Elphin’s homosexuality. And yet, in a curious way, and despite Michael’s deceitful nature, he has a certain kind of naivety that almost translates into innocence. His visit to Elphin’s house demonstrates these aspects of his character very well. Michael’s scheming to sexually blackmail Elphin into securing him a place at Api College reveals his cunning as well as indicates that he will take extreme measures to advance himself. Importantly, it is here that Michael is first compared to Judas as Elphin accuses him of being a spy for the authorities: ‘Now tell me who sent you here to tempt and betray me. Judas, not Adonis’ (HT 28). Their exchange, absurdly comical, reveals Michael’s temper as well as his naïve and erroneous outlook on human morality and social influence. At the same time, Jenkins implies the hypocrisy and corruption of the wealthy and powerful through Michael’s perspective:

Mr Elphin sighed. ‘You do not need an education. You are already vile enough.’

‘Vile? What is vile?’

‘Evil. Wicked. Corrupt. Morally ruined.’

Michael felt flattered. *Certainly those words were not meant to be compliments, but in a way they were. Only to a person of importance could they ever be applied.*

‘So beautiful and yet so treacherous,’ sighed Mr Elphin. (HT 29, italics mine)

The analogy made in this scene between Michael and Judas anticipates Michael’s betrayal of Azad and the rebels, as well as continues after he informs the police of their whereabouts. Thus John Melrose, the Scottish Assistant Commissioner of Police, thinks of and refers to Michael as Judas (HT 109, 114), as do Mary Reynolds (HT 154, 159) and Mr Wee, teacher in Api College (HT 187). Furthermore, Michael’s despair after his letter to the *Daily Times*, accusing Elphin of sexual harassment and appealing against his exclusion from the College, reflects ironically on his own role as traitor later in the narrative. Rejected by his sister Kasu (amah to a British expatriate who feels incensed at Michael’s accusation against Elphin), Michael, who ‘had long ago learned that people were insincere and selfish, prepared to lie, cheat, and deprive others in order to serve their own ends’, is nevertheless ‘surprised and frightened’ by his sister’s rejection (HT 78). Perceiving Kasu’s refusal to welcome him as a ‘betrayal’ (HT 78), Michael is unaware that her hostility

derives from the sheer need not to offend her employer, so that she will not lose her meagre livelihood. The real irony lies in the fact that Kasu's rejection becomes trivial by comparison with Michael later betraying his own brother into prison for the sake of his own intellectual ambitions. Michael's thoughts on his sister therefore further reflect his role as Judas in the novel, as well as emphasise how misguided is his moral judgement.

During the scene when the rebels come to hide in Michael's cave in the jungle, Jenkins emphasises that Michael is unaware of his ultimate intentions. Indeed, his decision to reveal himself to the rebels—which takes courage since they could shoot him on the spot—appears to spring from a genuine desire to help them, and the fact that one of the rebels, Khamis, is Michael's brother would appear to suggest that even the fifty thousand dollar prize promised for Azad's capture would not make him betray them. Yet, as Michael offers his help, the fine divide between his naivety and his guile is made evident, as well as Michael's own unawareness of this ambiguous paradox:

It was then that Michael proposed to go into Api to buy penicillin and anything else they needed ... He promised to be very discreet, and he ended by pointing out that it was his duty to help them, for his brother's sake.

Every word he spoke was ingenuous, and therefore far more convincing than conscious deceit could ever have been, *especially as his ingenuousness, though he hardly knew this himself, was almost completely genuine.* (HT 97, italics mine)

Importantly, Michael seems ignorant of his moral culpability. He is consumed with ideas of self-importance and intellectual advancement, and never seems to consider his betrayal of Azad as morally reprehensible. For example, as he takes the police to the cave he finds Yahya's calling him foul names 'strange and unjust' (HT 120), and does not understand why Melrose shows more kindness to the rebels than to himself. Michael seizes on propaganda that Azad is a tool of Indonesian Communism to justify his actions, and feels that he should be saluted as a hero who has saved Kalimantan from the Communist threat represented by Azad. It is clear that political propaganda as well as Michael's self-centred mentality have twisted his perceptions of morality and loyalty. His moral judgement is corrupted even further by those officials, British and Kalimantan, who applaud his betrayal of Azad and the rebels as patriotic and heroic. Thus Michael's moral folly is encouraged by the political system and by his educators, such as Dr Topman, Principal of Api College. At the same time, Jenkins's presentation of various viewpoints means that Michael's actions have to be seen in an ambiguous light, as is most specifically exemplified as Captain Basingford explains Michael's situation to the Sultan of Runebi: 'the informer, reasonably enough, feared reprisals, particularly as among those he *had betrayed, or rather had patriotically informed on*, was his own brother' (HT 132, italics mine).

By shifting narrative focalisation onto Commissioner Melrose when Michael informs him of the rebels' whereabouts, Jenkins gives us a different perspective on Michael's character as well as inviting us to question formerly given views of the rebels' treason and culpability. Melrose's reflections on the Runebi rebellion reveal that Azad and his followers were democratically in the right, and this fact makes Michael's treachery emerge even more clearly, especially with reference to later misplaced praise and recognition of him as patriot. Jenkins's ironic presentation of Michael's moral worth is thereby intensified in this scene. Through Melrose's thoughts, moreover, the paradox of Michael's naivety, guile, and self-importance is made prominent:

In his job Melrose fairly often had to deal with native Judases ... Never before, though, had he found Judas so young, so modest, so apparently unaware of what a nauseating act betrayal was.

[...]

... [Michael] was no ordinary specimen. No one could have been more respectful, and yet he was by no means overawed. Indeed, as he sat smiling across the desk he gave the impression at times that he considered himself the superior. (*HT* 109)

Jenkins's deployment of Melrose's perspective further underscores the author's concern with human morality. Though fascinated by Michael's 'apparent lack of malice or greed' (*HT* 111), Melrose feels that by acting on Michael's clue he is involving himself in an immoral action. The issue of complicity is important here; Melrose has a sense of shared guilt when deciding to follow Michael's lead, even to the point of envying a coolie cutting the lawn outside the police station: 'he at least had no share in the guilt binding Melrose to the simple-minded traitor' (*HT* 112). Although Michael is the actual traitor and therefore the one who carries the real guilt, Melrose's job involves him in the treachery committed by Michael. Jenkins thus suggests that as human beings we often come to share other people's guilt through our social and professional responsibility. Jenkins stresses how Melrose's sense of morality is compromised by his duty as Police Commissioner, which means he has 'no right to a private conscience' (*HT* 113). This concern with involvement and shared guilt is later echoed in the thoughts of Mary Reynolds, as she learns of Michael's treachery: 'she hated herself ... because of Eking's betrayal of Azad: that was a debasement in which she, and the whole world, were involved' (*HT* 156).

The central episode in Michael's personal development is situated near the novel's conclusion, and comes after he has become involved in the political activities of James Undan's Dusun Association (a political party representing the indigenous population). Michael at first sees Undan's interest in him as another manifestation of his own importance. His ultimate disillusionment and moral self-confrontation are set off by the realisation that Undan is only using him as a political instrument. It is here that Michael

starts to feel uneasy, his confidence faltering as he imagines that he may lose his place at the College and 'find himself up to the thighs in muddy water, clutching rice plants, like a man returned from a dream' (*HT* 225). In contrast with his previous self-assurance, Michael realises that his progress towards self-advancement is highly precarious and not only dependent on his own ingeniousness and intellect, but on other factors, such as how successfully Undan can use him for furthering the Dusun cause. Self-confidence, callousness, and conceit are liable to fail when faced with the manipulative power games of politicians.

In the final chapters of the novel, Michael's former ways of thinking are gradually subverted as he is confronted with his own selfishness and folly. He realises that his selfishness and his inability to love other people have made him an outcast from ordinary humanity, and he now despairs at his loneliness instead of welcoming it:

Why of all the people in the world was he the only one left alone? He knew the answer Mrs Reynolds would give: he was alone because he cared only for himself; which was true enough, because if a person loved himself too much he could let no one come close to him, even if anyone wanted to. (*HT* 236)

This acknowledgement signifies new self-awareness, and immediately precedes an even more poignant self-confrontation. This is the sudden revelation that Michael has been unfair to his people in thinking that money and education matter more than self-sufficiency, kinship, faithfulness, and friendship. Formerly contemptuous of their backward stupidity and lack of ambition, and seeing them as 'fit only to be the white men's servants' (*HT* 238), Michael comes to recognise the essential wisdom inherent in his people's interdependent self-preservation. Michael waits alone for a bus to Api after the Dusun Tamu Besar (Great Market), during which he has delivered a political speech for Undan:

The contrast between him then, alone and neglected, on the dark road, with not a soul in the world knowing or caring where he was, and his glory of the morning, in the big car, and of the afternoon, on the platform beside Undan, speaking to those hundreds of people, was too poignant, so that tears came into his eyes. They were of self-pity but also of self-condemnation. He had not been fair to his countrymen. If they remained faithful to their kampongs and their friends as poor as themselves it was not out of stupidity or lack of ambition, as he had thought, but out of an instinct as natural and self-protective as that of any animal. They knew in their bones that they must create one another's safety and happiness, making use of simple things within their reach, such as laughter and companionship. What he had despised, and feared, as ineradicable backwardness was now seen to be a kind of wisdom, not inferior to any to be found in books. (*HT* 238)

As we approach the novel's conclusion, therefore, Michael has realised that he has been unfair to his people. He has certainly learned something new, and his former arrogant

conceit is apparently defeated by self-condemnation. Even so, Michael is still unsure whether his betrayal of the rebels was right or wrong. He persists in believing that his own interests came before the rebels' safety: 'if he had not reported them ... it would have been like putting himself in prison, for he would have lost for ever any chance of winning a place in the College ... Certainly he had not wanted to do Azad any harm, he had just wanted to do himself good' (*HT* 239). This inner debate, however, is cut short by his death at the hands of—so it is implied—Azad's other son, and therefore we never learn the outcome of his moral questioning. Thus Jenkins denies Michael the chance to show whether his new self-awareness is permanent or transitory, and Michael's story ends in a highly ambiguous manner, while the circumstances of his death carry overtones of sacrifice and atonement. Dying under his holy tree, Michael becomes, so to speak, an offering to the god in propitiation for his past sins.

Endnotes

- ¹ Jenkins used the name Nurania instead of Afghanistan in the first edition of the novel.
- ² Bernard Sellin, 'Robin Jenkins: The Making of the Novelist', *Cencrastus* 24 (1986): 9.
- ³ 'Match Points', rev. of *Dust on the Paw*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 4 August 1961: 477.
- ⁴ Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978) 277.
- ⁵ Glenda Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins, and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985, 269.
- ⁶ Douglas Gifford, 'Recent Fiction: Forms of Compassion', *Books in Scotland* 21 (Summer 1986): 12.
- ⁷ See Maurice Lindsay, *History of Scottish Literature* (London: Robert Hale, 1977) 432; and Jack Webster, 'Why this rare Scottish talent hides potential classics in a farmhouse drawer', *Glasgow Herald* 25 June 1984: 7. Lindsay compares the novel with Graham Greene's overseas situations, and Webster argues that it is 'every bit as good as' *A Passage to India* by Forster.
- ⁸ In Forster's novel, Adela Quested accuses the Indian Dr Aziz of assaulting her during their trip to the Marabar Caves. Although he proclaims his innocence, and despite the fact that much detail of the incident is unclear and unsubstantiated, the British community, with one exception, unites in its condemnation of Aziz. Consequently, Turton the Collector feels the urge to 'flog every native he saw' (162), thereby projecting the assumed guilt of one native upon all Indians. Eventually, Miss Quested withdraws her accusation, much to the chagrin of her compatriots, because she is unsure whether the attack was real or hallucinatory.
- ⁹ Firdausi is the Persian poet Abu al-Qasim Firdawsi (940?-c. 1020?), who has been called the Homer of Persia and is best known for the great epic poem *Shah nameh* (Book of Kings), which is more than seven times the length of Homer's *Iliad*.
- ¹⁰ Personal Interview 21. Jenkins argues that the chief 'burden of being human' is man's inability to be humble in the same way as animals are.
- ¹¹ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 272.
- ¹² 'Match Points' 477.
- ¹³ The example of Wahab and his desire to marry a white woman reflects aspects of Fanon's arguments in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Interpreted from Fanon's perspective, Wahab wants a white woman because she can give him what otherwise would only belong to those who are white and Western. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967) 63.
- ¹⁴ Gifford, 'Forms of Compassion' 11.
- ¹⁵ J. A. Fairgrieve, 'Instruments of God? Female voices in the fiction of Robin Jenkins', Diss., U of Glasgow, 1997, 27.
- ¹⁶ The real aborigines of Borneo are the Dayaks who are physically the result of long-term admixture of Chinese, Malay, and Negrito peoples; the Dayaks were headhunters, but this practice is dying out rapidly. Jenkins's use of the term 'Dusun' for the Borneo aborigines could originate in the fact that the Dayak peoples include the Dunsun group, one of three Dayak groups whose main livelihood is agriculture and fishing.
- ¹⁷ 'Colonial crudities', rev. of *The Holy Tree*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 8 May 1969: 481.
- ¹⁸ Hart 279.
- ¹⁹ See Katherine Anne Porter, *Flowering Judas and Other Stories*. New York: Random House, 1940.
- ²⁰ Robin Jenkins, interview, 'The Symbolism of Good and Evil: Studies in the Novels of Robin Jenkins', by Winifride Logan, Diss., U of Glasgow, 1991, 42.
- ²¹ J. H. Philpot, *The Sacred Tree or the Tree in Religion and Myth* (London: Macmillan, 1897) 16.
- ²² Tying pieces of coloured rags to trees is still customary in places like Kurdistan, where this signifies an offering to the deities within the Yezidi religion. This ancient custom has moreover developed into the modern Western tradition of decorating the Christmas tree.
- ²³ See F. Marian McNeill, *The Silver Bough* vol. I (Glasgow: William MacLellan, 1957) 65-68.
- ²⁴ Hart 279.
- ²⁵ It seems most likely that Jenkins based the revolution in *The Holy Tree* on the armed rising which took place in Brunei in December 1962. The uprising was led by the PRB (Brunei People's Party), which had won an overwhelming victory (54 out of 55 seats) in the elections to the Legislative Council in the summer of 1962. The reason for the rebellion was that the PRB had put forward a motion that was entirely rejected by the Speaker of the Legislative Council, and the uprising was then ordered by the leader of the PRB, Sheikh Ahmad M. Azahari. Eventually, the revolt was suppressed with the help of British troops. See Graham Saunders, *A History of Brunei* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) 147-153. In Jenkins's novel, the British play a large role in quelling the rebellion, and the rebels' leader is called Azad, which is somewhat reminiscent of the name Azahari. The name 'Runebi', used here for Kalimantan's neighbouring state where the rebellion takes place, is, of course, an anagram of 'Brunei'.

Chapter 4:

Art, Love, and the Human Family: *The Sardana Dancers* (1964)

The Sardana Dancers is different from the other foreign novels of Robin Jenkins in that it is not set in an Eastern country subjected to British influence or authority. Instead, it is set in Spain, where Jenkins worked for the British Institute for two years, and the novel tells the story of English twins Jonathan and Madeleine (Maddy) Broxmead, both aspiring artists unsure of their creative talent, who live in a villa in Cabo Creus and are sustained in their easy and luxurious lifestyle by the annuity left to Jonathan by his aunt. Their comfortable but dull life is transformed by the unexpected arrival of two strangers, Montserrat Puig, a university student from Barcelona who is on the run from the police for anti-Franco activities, and John Lynedoch, a Scottish painter of extraordinary genius. *The Sardana Dancers* has a broad range of characters from various backgrounds, and through the juxtaposition of different social and moral perspectives, Jenkins explores many issues and themes, ranging from the relationship between morality and artistic creativity, confrontations of class,¹ and politics and nationalism. Above all, *The Sardana Dancers* is a story of human fallibility, moral questioning, personal growth, and self-discovery. These central aspects are focused in the story of Jonathan Broxmead, his love for Montserrat Puig, and in the novel's concern with human unity, symbolised in the title and the Sardana, a native Catalan folk dance that figures predominantly in the narrative.



Throughout the narrative, Jonathan Broxmead is referred to by other characters, and even by his sisters, as pompous, selfish, cowardly, and emotionally immature. Jonathan himself often accepts such criticism. From early on, Jonathan's psychological isolation is made abundantly clear, but while this causes him some frustration, it is also implied that it is partly imposed by his own moral fastidiousness, social arrogance, and ignorance of love and suffering. The question of creative talent is central to Jonathan's personal development. Thus the novel's beginning describes Jonathan trying to convince himself that he should give up his attempts to be a writer, since his novels have never been accepted for publication. To admit that he lacks artistic talent is a 'moment of truth' for him (SD 9), and he wonders whether his aunt's legacy would not be better spent on 'relieving misery and combating cruelty', instead of on prolonging the 'deception of himself as a writer of genius' (SD 10). Jonathan is introduced as yet another of Jenkins's protagonists trying to define their personal moral and creative values, and whose self-perception is laced with uncertainty and self-reproach.

The arrival of John Lynedoch at Jonathan's house intensifies still further Jonathan's self-questioning. Jenkins's portrayal of these two very different men also underlines the novel's concern with the question of art, as Lynedoch's obvious genius as a painter heightens Jonathan's sense of inadequacy. While seeing Lynedoch's Scottish working class background as a mark of social inferiority, Jonathan's arrogant condescension towards Lynedoch is mixed with resentment and envy. Convinced of the superiority of his class, he finds the Scotsman uncouth and dour, yet constantly measures his failure against Lynedoch's genius. Above all, Lynedoch's presence prompts Jonathan to examine more fully within himself whether he has the appropriate background, experience, and vision to achieve artistic expression. Thus the novel early introduces a central question regarding the nature of art: what produces artistic talent—is it human suffering, is it love, is it yielding to temptation, or is it simply an arbitrary gift, seen by the religious as a gift of God's? Certainly, Jonathan's perspective suggests that creative talent is either determined by fate or realised through suffering:

He wondered if his lack of creative talent had been pre-ordained at the beginning of the world, as the Calvinists believed; or whether his too hasty flight into the wombly warmth of Spain had shrivelled the small talent he had been given. If he had gone north to Lynedoch's Glasgow instead, would the cold, murk, and inspissated [*sic*] philistinism have tormented him too into vision? Genius was shaped by suffering. He had never suffered. (SD 28)

While the question of creative talent is one of the novel's major concerns, it is closely linked with the issue of human unity as presented through Jonathan's story. In this respect, the title of *The Sardana Dancers* is highly significant. The Sardana is a Catalan folk dance, in which the dancers link hands with raised arms, forming circles which grow larger as more people join in.² As a dance, the Sardana celebrates the group, its ring being a symbol of brotherhood, mutual interdependence, and democracy.³ Jenkins clearly uses the Sardana throughout the novel in a symbolic way, so that it both epitomises and emphasises the novel's concern with human unity, wherein the characters' interactions and the narrative process make up both the separate parts and the links of the 'circle of humanity' (SD 44). It is also significant that Jonathan and Montserrat dance the Sardana early in their relationship, which, if ironically, suggests that they are moving towards harmony and unity. On a more general level, humanity and community are represented by the Sardana as one whole, a conglomerate assembly of various backgrounds, temperaments, and status. This is what Jenkins appropriately terms 'the human family' (SD 45), and his use of the Sardana dance as a symbol in the novel emphasises further the colour and diversity of humanity. *The Sardana Dancers* accordingly suggests that human

life, for all its variety, is in effect one universal cycle in which we all participate. In other words, we are the dancers, and the Sardana is life itself.

While thus focusing on the question of human unity, Jenkins's portrayal of Jonathan suggests that there are always those who are isolated and set apart from the human circle. Like many of Jenkins's other protagonists, such as Angus McArthur of *A Love of Innocence* and Duffy of *Just Duffy*, Jonathan is an outcast, unable to participate fully in ordinary humanity, and it is implied that his aloofness, social condescension, and moral fastidiousness contribute to this isolation. His personal relationships are never deep or intimate, and even though he feels close to his twin sister, he cannot understand Maddy's liberal sexual behaviour which not only shocks him, but also to a certain degree makes him feel ashamed of her. Indeed, it is suggested throughout, both through Jonathan's own perspective and other characters', that his main shortcoming lies in his inability to understand and engage closely with other people. Jenkins moreover suggests that because of his aloofness, Jonathan cannot render convincing the people and circumstances of his fiction. Being self-absorbed means exclusion and lack of artistic vision:

Jonathan stared at Lynedoch, possessor of vision. What in those blessed moments did this Scotsman, so frequently commonplace, and at present almost moronic with his drunken scowlings, see that was miraculously different from what the spiritually purblind such as Jonathan himself were doomed to see every moment of their lives? Did having vision mean the ability to see other human beings as they truly were, not obscured and diminished by the indestructible screen of one's own self? (SD)

But this is where Jenkins's argument becomes complicated and even confusing. Lynedoch, also presented as an outcast, is nevertheless an artistic genius. What is it that makes him different from Jonathan? Thinking of the 'human family', Jonathan concedes that because of his scruffy and dishevelled appearance, Lynedoch is the most eligible person for membership. Yet, if 'he [Lynedoch] had genius, if God's finger was upon him, if he looked on glories, he would not, could not, be admitted' (SD 45). Jonathan's artistic vision suffers because he stays outside humanity, but Lynedoch is an outsider precisely because he is a genius. There is clearly a paradox here. However, Jonathan and Lynedoch are basically very different characters, and this provides the key to interpreting Jenkins's argument. Lynedoch differs from Jonathan in that he stands 'at the centre, watching, appreciating, absorbing, but never letting himself be involved'⁴ (SD 281), whereas Jonathan is always situated at the margin, his indifferent and pernickety nature rendering awkward and unsuccessful his frequent attempts to become involved and to have a say in other people's lives. Accordingly, Jenkins's argument seems to be that there are two kinds of outcasts, namely those, such as Jonathan, whose awkwardness, apathy and

fastidiousness sets them apart, and those, such as Lynedoch, who have been 'chosen' to view humanity from what they consider to be a superior and privileged position.

In a general sense, therefore, Jonathan's dilemma is that he is caught between two realities. He is able to penetrate neither the world of true art nor the real essence of humanity. As the story unfolds, Jonathan seems increasingly caught between these two levels of existence. Even when comparing himself to Norman Ashton, an Evangelical fanatic, Jonathan reaches the depressing conclusion that 'Norman's religiosity might be spurious and even sinister, but at least it was an interest through which he became involved, however futilely, with other people' (*SD* 96). Jonathan's isolation is thereby emphasised still further through his self-awareness. At the same time, it is evident that Jonathan does not make a real effort to know and understand his fellow human beings. His feelings of social superiority together with his artistic aspirations make him perceive himself as above the trivialities of ordinary life, so that he does not even show the remotest interest in the Spanish people amongst whom he lives. Even his short-lived contemplation of marrying his maid, Ampara, had derived from his wish to be accepted as a writer; marrying Ampara would mean that 'his whole inadequate nature and the course of his life' would be altered, and thus he might be 'convulsed into writing acceptable stories' (*SD* 14). Jonathan's interest in other people is therefore superficial and contrived, and exists only for the sake of his art. In this sense, Jenkins's portrayal of Jonathan as artist anticipates the later Angus McAllister of *Poor Angus*, who perceives women only as objects and as inspiration for his paintings.

However, the arrival of Montserrat Puig marks a new beginning, as Jonathan's infatuation with her means that he experiences one of those human emotions he was ignorant of before. Furthermore, Montserrat's involvement in the Catalan patriotic movement⁵ and her brother's imprisonment bring a new dimension altogether into Jonathan's life. Fiercely opposed to politics, and convinced that keeping out of them is a matter of principle, Jonathan is shocked to hear of Montserrat's background. He flatly refuses his friend Terence's suggestion that he help the Spanish girl by hiring her as a nursemaid for his sister, Isabel, on the grounds that he would be insulting the hospitality of the Spanish government, and because he believes that 'meddling in subversive politics is ignoble in a woman' (*SD* 114). Yet the underlying hint is that Jonathan's real reason for objecting to Montserrat's political involvement is his fear that his harbouring a revolutionary will be found out by the police, and that he will be told to leave Spain. It is implied that Jonathan is aware of his cowardly motives when, on his way to meet Montserrat, he feels 'afraid of her, not as a person, but as a symbol of his own weaknesses' (*SD* 109). The idea of perceiving someone else as a symbol and correlative for one's own

weaknesses recurs elsewhere in Jenkins's fiction, as in *The Cone-Gatherers* where Duror sees Calum's deformity as emblematic for his own miserably stunted life. But Jenkins takes this idea even further here, as he does later in *Leila*, and portrays the heroine not merely as a symbol of the protagonist's weaknesses, but also as a constant challenge to his unadventurous and limited existence. Thus Montserrat's courage, dignity and determination in the face of her brother's imprisonment and her mother's illness bring into prominence Jonathan's caution and timidity, along with his reluctance to step outside the boundaries of what he sees as a proper way of living.

Significantly, Jonathan's love for Montserrat marks a change in his perspective. Acknowledging that he has fallen in love, he feels that 'the long frost was over' (SD 184), and dancing the Sardana with Montserrat causes him joy 'so cathartic that he did not think he could ever again be arrogant, conceited, or aloof' (SD 207). Certainly, his love for Montserrat is a positive force within his progress towards self-knowledge because it brings him moments of clarity and truth. Although the transformation may not be complete, it is a step forward in the quest for self-discovery. This includes Jonathan's sudden need to know and love the village people whom he has hitherto ignored. His thoughts as he goes to ask the three Scottish girls to help him escape with Montserrat to France reveal how his perceptions of the villagers have changed from indifference to involvement:

...[He felt] the need to know and love some at least of these village people among whom he had lived for three years, and whom all that time he had regarded with no more affection than if they had been the heaps of rubbish they vexed him by dumping on the shore or on the tracks behind their houses. Almost every day he had passed them; sometimes he had greeted them, sometimes not, and never cordially. It had not mattered, they meant nothing to him, they were conveniences who supplied him with fish, vegetables, milk, bread, cheese, and wine. ... For all he cared they could have been wrapped in straw and laid on shelves. (SD 268-269)

In this scene, Jonathan has realised that a sense of community, respect for ordinariness, and social interaction are necessary if he wants to be part of the human family. The true wealth of humanity lies in its diversity, and it is this heterogeneity which should be cherished and loved. Further, as does Angus in *A Love of Innocence*, Jonathan acknowledges that his exclusion from ordinary human affairs is self-imposed. But, whereas Angus eventually rejects being drawn into everyday reality through domesticity, Jonathan seizes on his love for Montserrat as the means to overcome his selfishness and as the ultimate passage towards involvement. Through Jonathan's perspective, Jenkins suggests that selflessness and the ability to love are imperative to a genuine understanding of humanity and one's place within it. Achieving this may mean leaving behind what is safe and familiar, but it represents a challenge to one's self-perception:

Every country, every town, every village, every street, every house even, in which people lived, had its own distinctive flavour, compounded of innumerable ingredients, such as love and hate, pride and humility, laughter and tears, pity and arrogance, and others, not human at all, given by the earth, sea, and sky. Enjoyment of life consisted in being capable of relishing these flavours, which could never be done unless one's own contribution, however paltry, was freely added. And no one could add anything unless he had learned beforehand the value of what he had to contribute. That self-knowledge, never easy, was impossible if one kept repairing the barriers between oneself and everybody else. In that maze of selfishness even the taste of self grew quickly insipid, and became a poison. He had thought that the only way out might be through art; now he knew that love was the thread leading to the gateway. (SD 269)

Despite this movement towards transcendence and redemption, the tragic end of Jonathan's relationship with Montserrat seems to ultimately reinforce his status as an outsider. Jenkins's portrayal of Montserrat is important in this respect. This beautiful, graceful, and proud Spanish girl is reminiscent of other 'exotic' female heroines of Jenkins's fiction, such as Lan Moffatt in *Dust on the Paw* and the eponymous heroine of *Leila*, whose dignity, virtue, and even purity, give them an air of untouchability and mystery. Jenkins allows the reader little access to Montserrat's thoughts, and this makes her eventual rejection of Jonathan all the more inscrutable. However, we learn that, unlike his friends and family, who see him as conceited and callous, she thinks Jonathan is a good man. On the way to Barcelona, she reflects that what had attracted her to him was a kind of innocence, and that she had never met anyone 'who spoke the truth so uncompromisingly to himself' as he (SD 316). Montserrat's thoughts on Jonathan at this late stage in the novel alter our perceptions of him somewhat, and suggest that, despite his self-condemnation and others' criticism, he may have qualities that neither himself, his friends, or his sisters have recognised.

Eventually, however, Montserrat's motives for her temporary acceptance of Jonathan's offer of marriage are presented as highly ambiguous, to say the least. Furthermore, her thoughts and demeanour towards the end of the story undermine her previous positive assessment of his personality. There are hints throughout the last chapters that even if she does really love Jonathan, she may be using him simply as an excuse to leave behind the Catalan political struggle she has been involved in for so long. It is suggested that Jonathan represents 'an opportunity to escape into the kind of life that appeals to the coward [in her]' (SD 320-321). At the same time, her brother's voice within her mind questions her judgement of Jonathan's character:

'This Englishman is a godsend to you. That's why you minimize or ignore the shortcomings that exasperated Bridie and Terence, and even his sisters; and that's why you persist in calling his crass selfish unawareness of other people innocence.' (SD 320)

Consequently, Jonathan's feeling of exclusion and lack of 'a common humanity' (*SD* 331) after learning of the death of Montserrat's mother, foreshadows Montserrat's rejection of him, and implies that he has never become truly involved in her life. Although Montserrat's real motive for rejecting him is not revealed, her remark to the policemen who arrest her that 'He never was in it' (*SD* 338) signifies that, despite everything, Jonathan is still an outcast. Eventually, this is how Jonathan reads her words, as demonstrated by his thoughts as he sits desolate and miserable in a Barcelona bar:

He's never been in it, she had said. Yes, and even now, in this bar, was he not proving her verdict just, even if her sentence remained savage and unpardonable? Only he, of a hundred people, kept aloof, speaking to no one. Smiles, winks, nudges, gestures with glasses, remarks, all these he ignored, as he had always done. Yet he had come in here for their company. (*SD* 346)

Although Jonathan is thus presented as ultimately isolated and excluded through his own aloofness, it is clear that his attempt at becoming a part of Montserrat's unconventional, controversial, and even dangerous life has brought him new insight into human nature. In his love for Montserrat he has experienced joy which made him see 'the chances of life ... [as] inexhaustible and glorious' (*SD* 327). And eventually, his love for Montserrat teaches him what it is to suffer; her rejection makes him feel that what 'she was condemning him to was a lifetime of paralysing loss' (*SD* 337). It is clear that Jonathan's transcendence of his limitations has been transitory, but Jenkins leaves it open whether Jonathan's love for Montserrat, his moments of clarity and self-awareness, his relapse into isolation, and his ultimate loss will combine to inspire his first real work of art. Accordingly, Jonathan's suffering and loss may prove beneficial to his writing. This is suggested through Maddy when she comments on Jonathan's relationship with Montserrat:

'...the wonderful thing is you've at last stopped dipping in your toes only. In you've plunged, head-first, deeper than you know. I wouldn't be surprised if you were to come up with lumps on your forehead, bruises on your knees, and a book worth reading.' (*SD* 309)

The novel allows the possibility that suffering can produce artistic talent and inspiration, and this underlines further the importance of art in Jenkins's portrayal of Jonathan's moral pilgrimage.

Endnotes

¹ Although this is not discussed in detail here, it is important to note that Jenkins's treatment of social division and class confrontation is an important part of his moral questioning in *The Sardana Dancers*. By bringing into the narrative a number of Scottish characters from working class background—namely John Lynedoch and three Glaswegian girls on holiday in Cabo Creus—who then interact closely with the upper class Broxmeads, Jenkins draws our attention to the tensions that exist within the British social hierarchy. The two levels of British society presented through the Broxmeads and the Scottish characters represent two opposite aspects of the British social spectrum. Not only are they opposite in terms of material comfort, but also in terms of national (or 'regional') stereotyping. The Broxmeads' wealth, snobbery, and refinement of speech and manner situates them firmly within a stereotyped category of aristocratic 'Englishness'—so that they become almost caricatures of the English gentry—while Lynedoch's and the girls' Glasgow dialect solidly establishes their Scottish working class identity. Lynedoch is important in this respect; he is a vehicle for Jenkins's criticism of class division, and his native background gives the novel's social questioning a Scottish focus. Echoing the predicament of John Stirling in *Happy for the Child*, Lynedoch is profoundly ashamed of his background and, despite his genius and artistic self-confidence, he feels inadequate and inferior amongst the Broxmeads. His feeling of social inadequacy carries a rejection of his background, and his bitterness towards it is also related to his self-conception as an artist, as he feels that the coarse mentality he has inherited may seriously affect his genius: 'The enemy most likely to despoil his treasure was within' (SD 74). Simultaneously, Lynedoch's perspective on the Broxmeads and art suggests that he not only accepts their superiority, but perceives them as necessary to his own survival as an artist. Lynedoch's point of view thus demonstrates the inbred nature of class consciousness in British society, and both he and Jonathan are shown to be shaped by a class-divided society, allowing their social position to torture their consciences and affect their behaviour to other people. The social vision of *The Sardana Dancers* thus carries a sad reminder that social injustice still prevails in Britain, and Lynedoch's bitter, even paradoxical, perspective is especially important to the novel's underlying criticism of class division.

² 'Sardana', Tourism Catalonia web-site, 10 November 2000 <<http://tourism.catalonia.net/ckw/sardana.html>>

³ 'The sardana: a national symbol', Sardanista web-site, 10 November 2000 <<http://fed.sardanista.com/>>

⁴ It could be argued that Lynedoch is partly based on the author, as Jenkins has described himself as an observer and not a participator (Personal Interview 16). Aspects of Lynedoch's personal history are also parallel to Jenkins's. Like Jenkins, Lynedoch is the son of a charwoman, and he has left his native country to pursue his art elsewhere, as Jenkins did for a number of years. Lynedoch's paintings, inspired by his travels, but always influenced by his Scottish background, could arguably be a correlative for Jenkins's foreign fiction. Hart suggests that there are elements of Jenkins in Lynedoch: 'Perhaps he [Jenkins] is too much his own angry, antiphilistine Glaswegian artist Lynedoch, who despises Scotland' (Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978) 278).

⁵ Numerous references in the narrative indicate that Jenkins is drawing parallels between Catalonia's position as a country overtaken and ruled by another country (Spain) and Scotland's situation within the UK. For instance, David Reeves (Jonathan's brother-in-law) uses the Scottish nationalists as comparison when discussing the Catalonian situation and the severe punishment practised by Franco's government on Catalonian nationalists (SD 246). It is also suggested that Montserrat and Lynedoch are analogous characters because of their respective backgrounds: Jonathan sees them both as 'a kind of exile' from their countries (SD 143). While the comparison between Scotland and Catalonia is thus made explicit, Jenkins's use of this analogy is ironical also. Whereas Catalonian nationalism is treated as a threat against the Spanish government, Scottish nationalism is not taken seriously enough by the British government to attack it.

Chapter 5:

Subjugation, Surrender, and Sacrifice: *The Expatriates* (1971) and 'Imelda and the Miserly Scot' (1973)

The Expatriates and 'Imelda and the Miserly Scot' are both set in post-independence Kalimantan (Borneo)—although *The Expatriates* is partly set in Scotland—and have Scottish protagonists. Furthermore, both narratives present an inter-racial sexual relationship that emphasises a white man's sexual domination over a coloured woman, and Jenkins's portrayal of these again emphasises his satirical perspective on British imperialism as well as his concern with the moral hypocrisy inherent in racial prejudice. Simultaneously, his portrayal of Ronald McDonald of *The Expatriates* and Andrew McAndrick of 'Imelda and the Miserly Scot', and these characters' cowardice in the face of their own and others' racism, brings into prominence the conflict between natural desire, on one hand, and social and institutional conceptions of moral conduct, on the other. At the same time, *The Expatriates* has a much broader variety of characters whose personal development, and that of Agnes McDonald in particular, underlines further Jenkins's preoccupation with the human desire to transcend its own limitations. Accordingly, this chapter will focus predominantly on *The Expatriates*, while specifically referring to 'Imelda and the Miserly Scot' within the context of inter-racial relationships and their significance to Jenkins's treatment of the imperial theme.

*

The Expatriates tells the story of Ronald McDonald, a Scottish former colonialist now resident at Martyrs' Brae,¹ a mansion just outside Muirkirk,² who is haunted by his past in Kalimantan and the fact that he had an illegitimate child there with his native servant, Jenny (Sui Jin). Now engaged to the haughty Margaret Ormiston, owner of an expensive dress shop in Glasgow and occupier of Muirkirk's biggest house, McDonald decides to return to Kalimantan in order to bring his daughter Nancy back to Scotland. Once married to Margaret—who reluctantly agrees to his plan—McDonald and his wife, along with McDonald's mother, Agnes, travel to Kalimantan to claim Nancy. Their arrival in Kalimantan causes some upheaval among members of the British community, and Jenny's eventual surrender of their daughter to McDonald has unforeseen consequences.³

McDonald is introduced through the perspective of Miss Pettigrew,⁴ the schoolmistress of Muirkirk, who plays the role of referee to McDonald's and his fiancée's discussion about bringing back his illegitimate, half-caste child. Despite being a minor character, Miss Pettigrew develops from spinsterish moral severity and primness to a new awareness of how she 'has avoided what was unusual, risky, or exciting' (TE 42), and

towards a realisation that 'the values upon which she had based her life ... were perhaps not the foundations of Christian civilisation after all but more likely were limitations placed on the human spirit' (TE 48). Becoming thus aware of what Jenkins's fiction continually presents as an essential part of the human condition, Miss Pettigrew is significant in being another of Jenkins's pilgrims of conscience. Also, her judgement on McDonald's character proves important, as she sees him as 'likeable enough, if rather characterless' (TE 9). Miss Pettigrew's perspective describes quite accurately how McDonald is presented. Indeed, he seems likeable enough—though cowardly, chauvinist, and selfish—but the limited access given to his feelings and thoughts suggests that he has little in the way of character.

Jenkins's use of narrative point of view is important in this context. *The Expatriates* is among many of Jenkins's novels in which he applies various third person perspectives, moving his narrative focus frequently from one character to another. However, this novel is different in giving very limited narrative access to its protagonist, McDonald. In *A Toast to the Lord*, for example, we are given knowledge of Agnes Tolmie's thoughts, feelings, and motives during most of the narrative, until the tragic happenings towards the end when this narrative access is suddenly removed. The reasons behind Agnes's ultimate behaviour are therefore unclear, the only explanations available being given through the outside perspectives of other characters. Despite this ultimate ambiguity, Agnes is a rounded character; we learn enough about her psychology to perceive her as real—if unpleasant and fanatic—and can therefore at least try to *guess* what lies behind her strange conduct at the end. Conversely, Jenkins's portrayal of McDonald is primarily realised through other characters' perceptions of McDonald, very rarely allowing us direct access into McDonald's thoughts.

A review of the novel criticises this aspect of *The Expatriates*, arguing that 'the nullity of the main man' must be a part of the reason why the novel is 'never deep or subtle enough to leave him [the reader] debating with himself which characters are meant to be egotistical or selfless, laughable or impressive'.⁵ Although I would disagree with the anonymous critic in the sense that Jenkins's portrayal of characters like Agnes McDonald and Florence Bennett—one of the expatriates of Kalimantan whose husband leaves her for his Chinese mistress—is insightful and compassionate enough for us to perceive them as *real* and, in the latter's case, *tragic*, it is certainly true that the novel's main weakness lies in Jenkins's two-dimensional portrayal of McDonald as well as in the overly stated sentimentality of McDonald's reunion with his daughter (TE 173). And yet Jenkins's presentation of McDonald's reaction when Jenny hands Nancy over to him—seen through

his mother's perspective—subtly indicates McDonald's underlying pain at his final abandonment of his former mistress:

[McDonald] was staring desperately at his daughter and her mother. He put out his hand. For an instant, light as a butterfly, it rested on Jenny's head. She blushed ... but she did not turn to look up at him. He stood staring at his hand as if there was a pain in it he would never be able to bear. (TE 174-175)

Moments like the above make us empathise with McDonald. Overall, such reader identification with him is rare. Indeed, the strong female focus of the novel, with particular reference to the prominent narrative presentation of Agnes McDonald's view of events, means, at the very least, that McDonald is not the *only* protagonist here. Indeed, Agnes McDonald's insightful and balanced vision, along with the amount of time spent focused on her perspective, means that we can read her as the novel's other protagonist.⁶

Significant to the main subject of this thesis, Agnes's perspective changes considerably as the story develops, especially in relation to her grand-daughter Nancy. Agnes's self-chosen isolation is disrupted once she is in Kalimantan, as her determination not to participate but merely to observe is quickly dismissed for her greater desire to ensure her son's success in taking his daughter back with him. It soon becomes apparent that this interest in her grand-daughter is caused by a desire for a positive meaning in life which may restore her faith in humanity. Being at heart deeply disappointed in humanity, she sees the child as a symbol of hope and redemption:

All her life she had tried to respect people only for what they were as persons, as members of the human race, with unselfish contributions to make. Rank, wealth, colour, and appearance had never deceived her. It might have been better if they had, for she would in that case have been left in the end feeling more confident and successful. As it was, having sought rarer qualities such as truth and moral courage in herself as well as others, she had come to the threshold of old age deeply dissatisfied.

Her grandchild was a last chance to dispel that dissatisfaction and let her begin anew. (TE 153-154)

Agnes's quest for morality and truth echoes similar quests in other novels by Jenkins, such as Andrew Doig's in *The Missionaries*, Andrew Rutherford's in *The Thistle and the Grail*, and Bell McShelvie's in *Guests of War*. All these characters eventually have to accept the limitations of their own humanity, and the message conveyed through their experience is always that no one is perfect and everyone is fallible. What is different about Agnes is that she has not accepted this fallibility even though she is aware of it. Her delight in the natural world has often made her compare 'the extravagance of nature, freed from morality, with the limitations of humanity bound by it' (TE 205),⁷ and yet she seems to look on her grandchild as a possible means of erasing these very limitations, feeling that they 'no longer seemed inevitable' (TE 206). The gradual change from spectator to

participator makes for a considerable development in her character, so that we can read her as one of Jenkins's lesser pilgrims of conscience. However, Jenkins removes the narrative focus from Agnes after the family leaves Kalimantan, and therefore we are left wondering what impact the news of Jenny's death will have on her.

Jenny's suicide, following her surrender of Nancy to McDonald and his departure with his family to Scotland, and its aftermath constitute yet another of Jenkins's ambiguous conclusions. The equivocal nature of McDonald's reaction to the news of Jenny's death is caused by the fact that we are denied knowledge of his real thoughts and feelings. Instead, his response to the news is presented through the observations of his wife. At the same time, Jenny's death is in line with other sacrifices of innocents in Jenkins's fiction that are presented as necessary to bring the plot to a moral or spiritual conclusion. According to Francis Hart, Jenny's sacrifice gives the novel's conclusion an optimistic resonance: 'Another innocent is sacrificed, and another tormented family, their thin humanity measured, their love exposed in its imperfections, feels chastened and glimpses a hope of forgiveness and grace'.⁸ Indeed, Jenny's death at least has a positive effect on Margaret McDonald, who, on hearing the news, is finally forced to recognise her own faults, along with condemning her own jealous and condescending treatment of her dead rival while in Kalimantan. This aside, Jenny's tragic sacrifice does little more than emphasise Ronald McDonald's already apparent selfishness and cowardice. Although stricken by some kind of grief for the mother of his child, he nevertheless seems in some strange way relieved that she is dead. Moreover, his wife reflects that while sobbing he is also 'in a way enjoying his grief' (TE 253). Yet the limited access given to McDonald's mind throughout the novel allows for some doubt here. Is his reaction to the tragic news read correctly by his wife, or is Jenkins's approach to her character and her understanding of her husband still meant as ironic, despite previous hints that she has changed? This essential ambivalence suggests that there is no straightforward optimism here as Hart would like to think. Instead, it is rather little Nancy's laughter and chatter than her mother's tragic death which carries an optimistic meaning at the end of the novel, while Jenny's sacrifice seems too easily swept under the carpet to make the novel's conclusion entirely satisfactory, making it reminiscent of the problematic ending of *The Cone-Gatherers*.



Despite Jenkins's two-dimensional portrayal of his protagonist, McDonald is important to Jenkins's moral exploration in *The Expatriates*, especially within the colonial and racial context. McDonald's past in Kalimantan is significant to Jenkins's treatment of the imperial theme. On a basic level, McDonald's loyalties are severely divided: on one hand, he is the white colonialist who has worked for and benefited from British imperialism in the East, has racist attitudes and sees the mixing of coloured and white as shameful and

wrong; on the other hand, he has had a sexual relationship with a native woman, fathered a half-caste daughter whom he loves, and, in his innermost soul, still loves the child's mother. This basic division lies at the heart of McDonald's dilemma, which is presented mainly through other characters and his mother in particular. However, his own reflections early reveal his colour prejudice along with his feelings of shame for having slept with a coloured woman. His thoughts on the incident that started his relationship with Jenny—that is, his rape of her—emphasises these aspects of his thinking, as well as his essential cowardice:

Drunk though he was, and impetuous with lust, he was still conscious how degrading it was for a man in his position to make love to his amah [servant], by force, especially a Sino-Dusun one, in her own bed [...]

She whispered to him not to, but made no effort to hinder him ... From beginning to end he was aware, with spasms of self-disgust, that this drunken sprawling upon this soft brown fragrant body could result in a child that would have his blood in it, and thick lips, slant eyes, and dark skin. (*TE* 59-60)

Shame and cowardice characterise McDonald's relationship with Jenny; despite his love for her and Nancy, these aspects of his character cause his first desertion of her and their daughter. On returning to Kalimantan, he cannot hide his racist nature, nor his embarrassment at being thus prejudiced. This is revealed, for example, when he refuses to accompany his mother on her visit to Nancy's native relatives; as Agnes realises, these relatives are 'personifications of his shame, all the more horrifying and hateful for being so ordinary and harmless' (*TE* 158). Through Agnes's reflections, Jenkins suggests that McDonald lacks the moral courage to challenge the racial prejudice displayed by himself and his compatriots, and that his inability to overcome his shame is essentially a result of British imperial ideology: 'Only part of Ronald was Nancy's father and Jenny's lover: another part remained unalterably the white colonialist. They would be at war in him all his life' (*TE* 159).

The importance of McDonald's moral dilemma is further revealed in the chapters describing his honeymoon with Margaret. Wavering between regret at having married Margaret, whose demanding love and determination frighten him, and pride at being able to show off his 'possession' of such a well-dressed and elegant woman (*TE* 60), McDonald toys with the idea of leaving her for the undemanding, submissive, and innocent Jenny. But, in his mind, making this choice would mean isolation from the expatriate community in Kalimantan as well as giving up his privileged life in Scotland: 'His life as Jaguar owner, as laird of Martyrs' Brae, as yachtsman, would be ended forever, to be replaced by another, among coloured people, slowly becoming as poor as they, and ultimately as degraded' (*TE* 66). Thinking of Tom Bannerman, whose marriage to a native woman was

seen as degrading by his British compatriots, resulting in his exclusion from the expatriate community, McDonald reaches the conclusion that 'Jenny, who loved him and had brought him so much private joy and peace, must degrade him as Bannerman had been degraded' (TE 66). Even despite acknowledging his love for Jenny and the happiness she would bring him, McDonald lacks the bravery to defy the colour prejudice of the Kalimantan expatriates. Neither does he consider taking Jenny back to Scotland to live with him. Once again, Scotland is presented as hostile and prejudiced towards inter-racial marriages.

Jenkins has made McDonald's relationship with Jenny symbolise the power imbalance there exists in the relations of Empire and colony. By choosing a Western woman for his wife, McDonald has opted for someone who is on an equal—in this case, even superior—footing with himself. Jenny's position is altogether different; she is inferior to McDonald first because she is an Eastern woman, culturally trained to view men as superior beings, secondly because she is his amah, and thirdly because she is a native of a former British colony. Her status of inferiority in their relationship is therefore threefold in nature. As a result, McDonald's relationship with Jenny is clearly based on his superiority, Jenny's inferiority, and his possession of her as woman, servant and native. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin suggest a parallel between women and colonised people:

... [women] share with colonized races and peoples an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression, and like them they have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors. Women, like post-colonial peoples, have had to construct a language of their own when their only available 'tools' are those of the 'colonizer'.⁹

Applying this theory to *The Expatriates*, we can read Jenny's role as representing two things: the female as oppressed by the male, and the native as subjected to the power of Empire. Referring again to Gorra's argument that the 'element of coercion' and 'demonstration of mastery' that characterises the white (Western) man's sexual treatment of the coloured (Eastern, native) woman, makes their affair an epitome of the relationship between empire and colony,¹⁰ it seems fair to say that *The Expatriates* presents precisely these aspects of the inter-racial affair in the relationship of McDonald and Jenny.

'Imelda and the Miserly Scot' proves an important comparison in this context. Apart from sharing their concern with a white man's sexual domination over a coloured woman, the two narratives have other similarities: both satirise the expatriate community, with its moral decadence, illicit affairs, neighbourly envy, and thriving gossip; and both end with the unexpected or sudden death of a main character. Furthermore, the two narratives are clearly focused on the racial divide there exists between white expatriates and natives in Kalimantan, showing the whites' prejudiced reluctance to mix, socially or

otherwise, with the Kalimantanans they live among. Most important in the context of Empire and racial divides is Jenkins's portrayal of Andrew McAndrick's affair with the Celebes-born Imelda in 'Imelda and the Miserly Scot'. The main difference between McDonald's and McAndrick's circumstance is that while Imelda's rare beauty makes other male expatriates envious of McAndrick, McDonald's relationship with Jenny is viewed in very different terms because of her lowly status as his amah. While Jenny is McDonald's servant, Imelda is more simply McAndrick's live-in mistress. The thoughts and feelings of McAndrick himself waver between pride at possessing the beautiful Imelda, and dismay at her dark colour. This struggle between pride and dismay in McAndrick is comparable to McDonald's inner dilemma, and is made explicit on several occasions. For example, McAndrick often, on waking up in the morning, feels 'startled and dismayed' by the darkness of Imelda's face beside him, knowing 'that his hope of her somehow becoming light enough in colour to pass as white was a cheat' (FC 43). And yet, despite the 'menace of that indelible darkness' (FC 43), he sometimes feels proud of her colour, seeing it as 'superior to scorched pink or acquired tan' (FC 49). Like McDonald, McAndrick is inherently racist; like McDonald also, he would like to overcome his own prejudice, but finds this impossible. Jenkins's portrayal of these two Scotsmen seems to suggest that not only is colour prejudice a direct result of imperialism, but also that it is an integral part of the Scottish psyche.

While McDonald's implicit preference for a submissive woman makes him seem somewhat chauvinistic, the detailed and compassionate attention given to various female characters and their psychology in *The Expatriates* means that the story focuses strongly on female experience. This is not the case with 'Imelda and the Miserly Scot', where Jenkins's portrayal of McAndrick's arrogant chauvinism satirises patriarchal ideology as well as Western assumption of ownership and power in the East. The point of view, as presented through Jenkins's focus on McAndrick, is extremely masculine and often very anti-feminist, as seen, for instance, in McAndrick's reflection that no woman is worth buying clothes for, since, 'After all, what they had to give him was best done naked' (FC 47). In line with this, McAndrick views of Imelda as his possession, to do with as he pleases, are highly unpleasant and disrespectful towards women, especially those of coloured skin. This is clearly revealed early in their relationship when McAndrick decides that Imelda is 'merely a kind of amah, whose duties were not to wash his clothes or cook his food, but to pleasure him in bed and raise his status among his friends' (FC 35). Throughout, the language used to describe his attitude towards her is, to say the least, loaded with mercenary and sexually exploitative meaning. The examples are abundant: his failure to perform sexually on the night he first seduces Imelda results in him not being

‘able to make full use of her’ (FC 33); on finding a scar under her left breast he feels cheated and thinks that ‘the bargain wasn’t perfect after all’ (FC 38); other expatriates’ admiration for her beauty ‘and congratulation for him amounted to a hundred per cent profit’ for buying her a new sari (FC 41); and when trying to get rid of her at the end of the story he feels ‘as desolate as if he’d lost all his savings’ (FC 64). Consequently, while satirising the reputation of Scots as parsimonious and mean, the reference in the title to McAndrick as a ‘miserly Scot’ takes on an ironic, dual meaning, relating both to his carefulness with money, and his ‘possession’ of Imelda.

Despite the many parallels between *The Expatriates* and ‘Imelda and the Miserly Scot’, their tragic conclusions are different in nature and offer differing interpretations of Jenkins’s treatment of inter-racial affairs and colonialism. Referring back to my argument that McDonald’s power over Jenny represents the power of imperialism, it seems that *The Expatriates* follows the ‘traditional’, Orientalist argument, as defined by Said, that ‘certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination’ (his italics).¹¹ That is, Jenny, in her innocence and unquestioning subservience, is made a representative for a colony’s ‘willingness’ to be subjected to imperial power. The novel’s tragic end then further establishes Jenny as a victim of white exploitation: after having surrendered her daughter to McDonald, who subsequently sets off for Scotland with Nancy, Jenny commits suicide. This final act demonstrates her subservience to McDonald in the most extreme way: she sacrifices her own life for his interests. Simultaneously, Jenny’s death is a symbolic reminder of the destructive effects of imperialism on native people and their culture.

By contrast, ‘Imelda and the Miserly Scot’ seems to ‘reinstate the marginalized in the face of the dominant’,¹² in both feminist and postcolonial terms. McAndrick’s reluctance to allow Imelda any sort of individuality in their relationship ultimately leads to his death at her hands. Imelda’s violent reaction at times, such as when McAndrick refuses to let her play golf after realising she would outshine him on the golf-course, foreshadows this conclusion as well as implies that Imelda has something of the brutal savage behind her gentle and passive façade. This is clearly demonstrated during her first serious attack on McAndrick, after he tells her that he cannot marry her. As Imelda charges at him with his favourite aborigine possession, a parang,¹³ she has become a head-hunter like her forefathers, a true savage, even animal-like: ‘Instantly she heaved it [the parang] up ... Her eyes were bloodshot. Her lips had gone thick. Her feet were paws’ (FC 58). And yet, despite this obvious allusion to Imelda’s savage nature, Jenkins’s irony suggests that such an intelligent and determined woman has every right to feel upset at McAndrick’s treatment. After all, as a woman and as a native, Imelda is being doubly oppressed and exploited by McAndrick, a male agent of imperialism. Her intelligence and persistence,

combined with her violent streak, mean that her rebellion against McAndrick's domination is inevitable; significantly, she uses another of his favourite souvenirs, an aborigine blowpipe, to kill him.¹⁴ Her ultimate murderous attack on McAndrick could thus symbolise an Eastern colony's refusal to be subjected to Western domination, and, it seems, suggests that such refusal, if not respected by the imperial power, can become brutal and bloody rebellion.

Endnotes

- ¹ The name 'Martyrs' Brae' could ironically reflect on later events, as Jenny's surrender of their daughter to McDonald and her subsequent suicide arguably makes her the martyr in this story.
- ² Unlike his many disguised Scottish country settings (such as Langrigg in *Guests of War*), Jenkins has here used the actual name of a Scottish town. Muirkirk is a town situated on the river Ayr in the Ayrshire moors, and nearby there is a monument to the leader of the so-called 'Cameronians', Richard Cameron, who was killed at Airds Moss in 1680. In the Scottish part of *The Expatriates*, there are references to a Covenanting monument in the neighbourhood of Martyrs' Brae, which commemorates two Covenanters who were overtaken and slaughtered by dragoons in the 17th century. The inscription on the monument refers to the murder of saints (TE 27) and could foreshadow Jenny's later sacrifice and martyrdom for McDonald. Nevertheless, it seems that Jenkins may be mixing up more than one Scottish location, namely Muirkirk and Mearnskirk, which is a wealthy suburb on the edge of Glasgow and the Ayrshire moors. As a wealthy district, Mearnskirk fits the idea of MacDonald's mansion and his big Jaguar better than Muirkirk, which is a poorer town than Mearnskirk.
- ³ Although some basics are different, the plot scenario of *The Expatriates* is strikingly similar to E. M. Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), which relates the efforts of an English family to 'save' a baby boy from being brought up in Roman Catholic Italy, and which also ends in tragic death. It is possible that Jenkins has (consciously or subconsciously) drawn on Forster's classic story while using a more decidedly imperial and racist setting.
- ⁴ Miss Pettigrew is one of many spinsters in Jenkins's fiction. It is very likely that Jenkins's choice of the name 'Pettigrew' is meant to reflect on her life and/or character, implying that her existence and outlook have grown 'petty' through not venturing beyond her limiting circumstances.
- ⁵ 'Offstage intensities', rev. of *The Expatriates*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 9 April 1971: 413.
- ⁶ Interestingly, there are numerous references to Agnes as spaewife, witch, and sibyl (TE 19, 20, 21, 31, 108, 229). She guesses that her son has a daughter in Kalimantan (TE 16-19), and can picture Nancy vividly in her mind without having seen her photograph (TE 110). Once Agnes has arrived in Kalimantan, the full significance of her second sight is emphasised, as she has a vision on the beach that foreshadows Jenny's tragic death (TE 109-110). Jenkins's portrayal of Agnes as witch does perhaps echo the recurrent witch-figure within Scottish literary tradition. Examples are Meg Murdochson of *The Heart of Midlothian* by Sir Walter Scott (1818), Erif Der of *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* by Naomi Mitchison (1931), and the various witches of the short story collection *Thou Shalt Not Suffer a Witch* by Dorothy Haynes (1949).
- ⁷ This aspect of Agnes's thinking echoes Jenkins's comment that humanity is limited by its inability to achieve true humility, while he sees animals as humble by nature. See Personal Interview 21.
- ⁸ Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London: John Murray, 1978) 279.
- ⁹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989) 174-175.
- ¹⁰ Michael Gorra, *After Empire: Scott, Naipaul, Rushdie* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 48.
- ¹¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993) 8.
- ¹² Ashcroft et al 175.
- ¹³ A parang is an aborigine weapon from the Borneo interior, formerly used by head-hunters to cut off their opponents' heads.
- ¹⁴ The blowpipe incident reappears in *Poor Angus*, when Fidelia from the Philippines kills Angus McAllister with a blowpipe off his wall. Jenkins expressed his surprise that I had noticed the parallel incidents, but pointed out that the blowpipe incident is entirely fictitious and not based on any real happening (Robin Jenkins, letter to the author, 14 December 2000).

Chapter 6:

Rewriting a Story? *A Figure of Fun* (1974) and *Leila* (1995)

A Figure of Fun is reminiscent of *The Expatriates* and, to some extent, *So Gaily Sings the Lark*, in being centred on the kind of moral challenge that is part of choosing between the love (or marital commitment) of two very different women. In his portrayal of the title's figure of fun, Alistair Campbell, Jenkins once more emphasises the fallibility of idealism, the limits of human moral ability, and the socially conditioned nature of morality itself. At the same time, Jenkins's approach to the legacy of British imperialism remains deeply sardonic. *A Figure of Fun* appeared to mark the end of an era in Jenkins's writing, since virtually all Jenkins's novels published after it, from *A Would-Be Saint* (1978) onwards, were all set in Scotland. For a long time, it seemed that Jenkins had altogether abandoned the exotic settings so prominent in the 1960s and 1970s period of his writing. However, 21 years after the publication of *A Figure of Fun*, Jenkins produced *Leila*, a novel that is set in Savu (Brunei) and, like *Dust on the Paw*, *The Holy Tree*, and *A Figure of Fun*, centres on the workings of idealism and morality in a world of cultural difference, racial prejudice, inter-racial relationships, and political revolution. It has been argued that *Leila* represents 'a reworking of older presentations' in Jenkins's fiction,¹ and that it is specifically similar to *A Figure of Fun*.² Indeed, there are many striking similarities between the two novels, and because of this, I have chosen to include a short discussion of *Leila* in this chapter. Focusing first on *A Figure of Fun* and on Jenkins's exploration of human fallibility through the development of Alistair Campbell, I will then discuss the ways in which *Leila* can be read as a rewriting of the earlier novel, and how Jenkins's approaches to human moral ability in *Leila* are comparable with or different from his treatment of this theme in *A Figure of Fun*.



A Figure of Fun tells the story of Alistair Campbell, a Scottish Educational Adviser and Chief Inspector of Schools in the Malaysian state of Niapa (based on Brunei in North Borneo). Holding ideals for equality and democracy, Campbell has become involved in local politics by writing articles for the Dusun Alliance of Niapa (a political party representing the indigenous people), and by secretly subsidising their newspaper. At the same time, he also plays golf with the Dato, the despotic Chief Minister of Niapa and enemy of the Dusun Alliance. Campbell's struggling conscience makes him one of the more obvious examples of Jenkins's moral pilgrims. Feeling inadequate, conventional, and limited, he constantly criticises and interrogates himself and longs for moral transcendence. He is in many ways a paradoxical man: while ruthlessly interrogating his

own actions and motives, he remains mostly oblivious to his self-deception and self-righteousness, and while castigating social and racial prejudice and injustice, his own actions and social status are in many ways based on notions of segregation and material privilege. He worries about the opinion of other people; his fear of being seen as 'a figure of fun' (*FOF* 112, 126, 130, 160) by other expatriates means that the many different and paradoxical moral choices cast before him through the course of the narrative prove even more difficult. Campbell's dilemma ultimately revolves around the question of whether he can meet strange, unwanted, and unsavoury moral challenges and defy the prejudice of his friends and compatriots, or if he should follow the herd, do what is expected, and accept a life of conventionality and moral mediocrity. This choice is encapsulated in Campbell's relationships with Anna Imrie, a Hungarian teacher in charge of a school for blind aborigine children, whom Campbell hopes to marry, and Fiona Kemp, a Scottish nurse who, in turn, hopes to marry Campbell.

Campbell is a man of principle, and Jenkins's presentation of him, and of other expatriates' perspective on Campbell, early suggests a discrepancy between Campbell's moral ideals and the British expatriate community's views of racial difference and social interaction. For example, Campbell's motion to change the rules of the whites-only yacht club to allow membership to natives is met with good-humoured opposition by the other expatriates, who view Campbell as 'obtuse with principle' (*FOF* 34), and interpret his desire for fairness and equality as an 'aberration' (*FOF* 37). But, describing the yacht club as the expatriates' 'haven of well-intentioned segregation' (*FOF* 33), Jenkins hints at the essential hypocrisy of the whites-only policy, since the idea of 'well-intentioned segregation', ironic in itself, is also oxymoronic by implication. The Britons delude themselves in thinking that their policy is not based on prejudice, and fail to see the racism inherent in their wish to be left to themselves. In reality, since they have lost political control in Niapa, the club has become a symbolic way to assert power over the Asians and to distinguish white from coloured, Western from Eastern. Simultaneously, the Britons' fierce opposition to Asian membership reflects their fear of what they do not know or understand, and bears witness to their unwillingness to get acquainted with the people and culture of Niapa. Accordingly, the yacht club becomes a sanctuary from the feared unknown and gives them a sense of familiarity in an otherwise alien environment.

Although Campbell's motion at the yacht club establishes him as a man of integrity who daringly challenges his compatriots' hypocrisy and prejudice, it soon emerges that he likes to approach moral problems in diplomatic ways. In his speech for changing the club rules, he applies the logic of politics rather than the conscience of morality. As he realises, he could have 'attacked their [the Britons'] inhumanity instead of their illogicality' (*FOF*

43). Instead, he is too concerned with keeping everyone happy: 'he hadn't wanted to offend men and women with whom he'd sailed, drunk, waterski'd, played bridge, and picnicked. At the same time he couldn't let down the hospitable, polite, humble, deserving natives of this country' (*FOF* 43). Campbell is accordingly one of those who choose compromise before confrontation. Yet, by not criticising the immorality of the Britons' colour prejudice, Campbell is not being true to his own ideals, and by making allowances for those who look down on natives, he betrays the natives and his own sense of social and moral responsibility. Dimly aware of this flaw in his approach, Campbell cannot help thinking that Anna 'might have found something false in his attempt to be fair to both sides' (*FOF* 43). Striving for moral transcendence, his compromise undermines his endeavours, since this means tolerating his compatriots' prejudice and hypocrisy.

Campbell's attack on his compatriots' racist policy would further seem to indicate that he is free of colour prejudice. However, as usually with Jenkins, there are no clear moral polarities in his portrayal of Campbell's motives and actions. Thus Campbell's motion in the yacht club more or less coincides with his plan to prevent his friend Archie Davidson from leaving his wife and children for a Filipino woman, Fidelia,³ who was formerly a prostitute. Convincing himself that he is acting in the interests of Archie's family, Campbell uses his golfing friendship with the Dato to get Fidelia deported from Niapa. The underlying suggestion, however, is that Campbell really objects to Fidelia because of her colour and her sexual past. He sees her as 'a whore tired of her profession' (*FOF* 58) and assumes that she became involved with Archie only for the sake of financial security. Usually taking the part of the poor, victimised and oppressed, Campbell condemns Fidelia because of her former prostitution, a profession no doubt forced on her through those very social injustices of which Campbell is so critical. Other aspects of Campbell's character emphasise this discrepancy between principle and practise, and idealism and reality, even further, especially his thoughts concerning Anna Imrie. Aware of her sexual relationships with coloured men, Campbell feels that she has been degraded and defiled, and thereby doubts whether she is really worthy of becoming his wife. His supposed respect for native peoples, whom he wants other expatriates to treat as equals, is thus drastically undermined by the belief that it is beneath a white woman to sleep with coloured men. This discrepancy is noticed by his compatriots, who know that Campbell himself would not associate with coloured women: '[Campbell was] as likely to take a crocodile to bed as a native woman. He deserved to be scolded for his inconsistency' (*FOF* 35).

At the same time, Campbell is painfully aware of his own inadequacy. To a great extent, this is due to his admiration for Anna Imrie. Campbell consistently measures his

own awkward and constrained altruism against Anna's selfless and spontaneous charity. Anna seems completely genuine in her friendliness to the poor and underdeveloped natives she works amongst, whereas Campbell's sympathy appears to be purely academic and based on 'moral training' (*FOF* 59) rather than true sentiment. In other words, his efforts at charity are based on principle while Anna's charity is based on love, as he early reflects:

... it had occurred to him that Anna Imrie might possibly be achieving through love, faith, instinct, or whatever it was, what he had never been able to achieve, in any substantial measure, through principle. Unlike principle love did not have to demand standards. (*FOF* 16)

Campbell sees moral qualities in Anna which are beyond his own ability; she has no standards, he claims, because 'she stands outside the circle of prejudice' while the rest are all trapped inside (*FOF* 60). Faced with the choice of marrying either Anna or Fiona Kemp, a sexy, robust, and pragmatic Scottish nurse, he believes that Anna is able to redeem him and help him transcend his limitations, while choosing Fiona would merely mean a lifetime of conventionality and mediocrity:

He was able then to remember Anna whose sexuality was subtle and unaggressive, and whose humanity was deep and comprehensive. With her he would be made to explore unknown areas of feeling and thought; he would become richer in his sympathies; his mind would indeed be a bountiful place.

Poor Fiona did not even know there was anything new to discover; even her sexual enticements were conventional. (*FOF* 109)

Fiona, with her earthy practicality, represents the safe, the comfortable, the commonplace. Her brazen sexuality tempts Campbell, and he finds her straightforward common sense reassuring. But wanting to transcend his limited perceptions, he is irresistibly drawn towards Anna. His love for Anna is mixed with admiration, fascination and fear: admiration for her moral integrity and her passionate idéalism, fascination for her mysterious subtlety and grace, and fear of the moral challenge that her uncompromising commitment to her ideals and her unconventional life-style represent.

Jenkins further suggests the superficiality of his protagonist's ideals through Anna Imrie's point of view, and provides us with more clues to Campbell's predicament. Anna's reflections reaffirm the notion of Campbell's efforts at charity as contrived and not spontaneous, acknowledging that 'Almost everything he did or said was right, and honourable', while stating that 'he did all this without ever giving the impression that he liked those he was championing' (*FOF* 64). Further, Anna sees Campbell as suffering from 'a peculiar blindness' (*FOF* 64). What this constitutes is not explicitly stated, but Anna's thoughts imply that this involves Campbell's inability to engage with and understand other people along with an arrogance and stubbornness that render him incapable of admitting folly of judgment. Or, as Anna reflects: 'he would go away with his

bit of rightness and work on it in private, not for the truth's sake but to justify himself' (FOF 115). Anna knows that Campbell's moral understanding and sense of compassion is placed firmly within the limits of those ideologies, Western and imperial, that are based on white superiority and view the mixing of races as unethical. Accordingly, he would never be able to understand the psychological reasons behind her desperate wish to have a half-caste child, which to her would be an important challenge to racial prejudice and a defiance of 'the world's cruelty' (FOF 115).

Yet Campbell's decision to marry Anna Imrie represents a significant breakthrough. Jenkins's use of simile and metaphor is significant here: 'He [Campbell] was not going to keep safely within his known limits, like a bullock in a daisy field; no, like a brave young bull, he was going to vault over those limits, and make for wilder, riskier, but more splendid pastures' (FOF 112). No longer opting for timidity and comfort, Campbell has chosen to explore those spiritual areas that exist outside the confines of his limited world. But, as often in Jenkins's fiction, the reader is in for a surprise: Campbell's resolution to be a 'brave young bull' does not constitute rising to a true moral challenge. Instead, the real test of Campbell's sympathy and courage lies in the scene that awaits him at Anna's house. Finding that she has just allowed a native youth into her bed, Campbell feels disgusted and offended, and is unable to grasp the truth behind Anna's perceived degradation. Witnessing what he sees as Anna's depravity—which really springs from her unhappiness and need for love and understanding—is the true test of Campbell's sympathy, love, compassion, and courage. His reaction demonstrates clearly the failure of his intention to extend the limits of his life, at any rate in the context of his relationship with Anna. In this sense, Campbell's moral limitations seem too solidly fixed for him to achieve transcendence.

Given the nature of the incident, however, the reader cannot entirely condemn Campbell for failing this test. After all, he finds Anna naked, with legs outspread, smiling contemptuously, and with the 'dregs' of the Dusun youth 'still on her' (FOF 122). Furthermore, Campbell does not really know Anna intimately, and although Jenkins presents the incident through Anna's perspective—thereby showing us sides to her character that Campbell is not familiar with and encouraging us to sympathise with her—it is nevertheless also beyond our capacity to understand the full extent of her psychological misery. In any case, Anna remains remote, enigmatic, even untouchable, despite the fact that we made to understand that her former marriage to a Scottish drunkard has left her psychologically scarred, deeply confused, and disillusioned about love. She is comparable to other characters in Jenkins's fiction, such as Calum of *The Cone-Gatherers*, Jenny of *The Expatriates*, and the eponymous heroine of *Leila*, whom Jenkins presents more as

emblems of an unattainable ideal rather than as solidly realised characters. Not surprisingly, this is how Campbell himself perceives Anna; he sees her as a paragon of integrity and idealism, but has never really seen beyond these ideas of her character. As a result, he does not know about her confusion and unhappiness, and the shock at witnessing what he perceives as her sexual humiliation is therefore all the greater. This is why we can surely at least empathise with Campbell's reaction to Anna's behaviour.

Nevertheless, Campbell becomes painfully aware of his failure as he settles into the comfort of Fiona's passionate devotion. He has to acknowledge the depth of his love for Anna, and his tremendous failure in not responding to her cry for help:

The truth was, he had heard it but he had not responded, afraid lest he be involved in a depth and complexity of trouble injurious to his peace of mind as well as to his career.

She had been a challenge calling for more courage and compassion than he had. (*FOF* 152-153)

Reminiscent of other central characters in Jenkins's fiction, Campbell lacks the mental resources to grasp the complexity and depth of Anna's predicament, comparable, for instance, with how the inner turmoil and despair of Tom Curdie are beyond Charlie Forbes's understanding in the earlier *The Changeling*. Like Forbes also, Campbell is ultimately driven to acknowledge his own limited understanding. At the same time, there is a positive lesson to be learnt about the nature of humanity. Disillusioned and depressed about his moral weaknesses, Campbell walks through the fruit market, charging himself with the 'power of humanity' (*FOF* 159). The cheerfulness and neighbourly goodwill reigning among the locals in the market reassure Campbell that he is not beyond redemption: 'In spite of much superficial callousness, people were at heart good. They forgave blemishes. His own, whatever it was, was moral, not physical, but he would not be cast out for it' (*FOF* 158). Goodness, Jenkins suggests, is as integral a part of the human psyche as is the propensity towards evil, and the essential wealth of humanity lies in people's ability to understand and forgive.

Arguably, the death of Anna Imrie marks the final step in Campbell's journey to self-awareness. After all, the news of her death by drowning—it is unclear whether by accident or suicide—hits Campbell very hard, and would seem to make him feel responsible for her fate. However, as in many of his novels, Jenkins suddenly removes all access to the protagonist's thoughts and feelings. Midway through the novel's last chapter, the focus is shifted to Fiona, through whose perspective the remainder of the story is related. The final pages of the novel chart Campbell's and Fiona's exchange on the night Campbell hears of Anna's death. Fiona deals with this new hurdle briskly and resolutely, but also, despite her jealousy of Anna, treats Campbell's emotional outbursts with affection

and compassion. The final passages therefore present this previously domineering, voracious, and sometimes vulgar woman in a different and more positive light than before, and reveal that her understanding and intuition outshine by far Campbell's own. Campbell's exhortations of Anna's worth, such as that Anna had been 'daring and unconventional' and had 'tried to extend the limits of life' (*FOF* 212), are met with Fiona's cool, common sense. In her view, Campbell's fascination with Anna's unconventionality is based on misconception, since, even for Anna, it is practically impossible to transcend human limitations. Practical and down-to-earth, Fiona knows that the key to happiness, success, and self-acceptance is learning to make the most of what life within those limits has to offer.

The effect of Anna's death is nevertheless highly ambiguous. Through Fiona's reflections, we are encouraged to question the sincerity of Campbell's grief, since she is not sure whether his 'sighs of pain and his tortured expressions were genuine or false or a mixture of both' (*FOF* 213). Furthermore, after the phone call from Samarinda (Campbell's friend from the Dusun Alliance, who has played a part in Campbell's dismissal from Niapa) it appears that Anna Imrie is hardly in Campbell's thoughts any more. Instead of grieving for Anna, his concern is now with how he is to blame for being sacked from his job and thrown out of Niapa. His main regret seems to be, not having failed Anna, but having failed to love the poor indigenous people of Niapa. But even this feeling of regret does not last, as the novel's final passages suggest that Campbell has finally accepted what Fiona tries to make him realise: that selfless love for one's fellow human beings, love that is free of scruple and fastidiousness, is practically impossible to achieve. In Fiona's thoughts there is the suggestion that Campbell's talk of moral responsibility and failure is merely a necessary part of 'his orgy of self-pity, remorse, regret, and shame', and that he will now 'return to his old sobriety, no better and no worse a man' (*FOF* 222). Ultimately, then, it is not made entirely clear what exactly, if anything, constitutes Campbell's new self-awareness. And yet the dismissal of his self-blame for the enjoyment of Fiona's love indicates that he has given up trying to overcome his own limitations. In this way, perhaps, by seemingly accepting once and for all his moral mediocrity, Campbell has finally achieved some kind of transcendence.

I would, however, argue that the novel's conclusion is flawed, and that Anna's death, combined with Jenkins's sudden removal of narrative access into Campbell's mind, diminishes the reader's former involvement and empathy with the protagonist. Comparable with Jenny's death in *The Expatriates*, Anna's death seems too easily swept under the carpet to make for a convincing end. Perhaps, similar to deaths in other novels like *The Cone-Gatherers* and *A Toast to the Lord*, Anna functions as a kind of sacrificial

victim, her death necessary to bring the novel to a resolution and to bring some kind of redemption or atonement to the protagonist. If so, is this an entirely convincing way to end the story? Although we cannot see into Campbell's mind, everything suggests that, after his short display of grief and guilt, Anna's death has not affected him as badly as it would surely have if he had truly loved her. How, indeed, is it so easy for him to abandon his grief for her in favour of his concerns about Samarinda and the dismissal from Niapa? Further, is there not something superficial and contrived in the last sentence of the novel, as Fiona speculates that a 'happy and successful life together was going to be theirs after all' (FOF 223)? As with Jenny's death in *The Expatriates*, and indeed with Calum's death in *The Cone-Gatherers*, the tragedy is brushed aside in favour of an optimistic ending.

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Compared to *A Figure of Fun* and Jenkins's other less known novels, *Leila* has attracted critical attention, though critics are not agreed on the level of its quality. It is praised in general terms by Paul Binding,⁴ described as 'a good read' by Suhayl Saadi,⁵ and praised by Douglas Gifford for 'making clearer than ever, in archetypal characters and narrative, the unchanging predicaments of humanity'.⁶ On the other hand, Carl MacDougall somewhat ambiguously suggests that the novel fails to meet the 'exacting standards' of *Fergus Lamont*,⁷ and Isobel Murray does not think it one of Jenkins's best novels.⁸ With the exception of Gifford, however, critics have failed to notice the full significance of *Leila* in relation to former developments in Jenkins's *oeuvre*, especially regarding the question of how heavily it draws on the earlier *A Figure of Fun*.

Leila is remarkably similar to *A Figure of Fun* in terms of plot, theme, and narrative structure. Both novels are set in a former British colony, in both cases based on Brunei, and both are concerned with the limits of idealism, racial and cultural difference, and local politics. Like Alistair Campbell, the protagonist of *Leila*, Andrew Sandilands, is Scottish and works in the field of education (as a teacher and vice principal). While Campbell hopes to be appointed as Minister of Education, Sandilands is also expecting a promotion, to become Principal at the Training College where he works. Like Campbell, Sandilands plays golf with the Sultan, despotic ruler of Savu, and is similarly presented as aloof, prudish, awkward, and dour, though liked and respected by his compatriots, especially for his expert skills at golf and sailing. Sandilands is a complicated and paradoxical character like Campbell, idealistic but beset by self-interrogation, painfully aware of his own inadequacy, opposed to racism yet inherently prejudiced towards colour, unimaginative and ordinary yet longing to transcend the conventional and comfortable limits of his existence. Further, both Campbell and Sandilands face a challenge and a choice, encapsulated in their relationships with two very different women. A nurse like Fiona Kemp, Jean Hislop is practical, efficient, robust, and sexy, her crassness and

vulgarity hiding her essential sensitivity and her genuine love for Sandilands. By contrast, the half Scottish, half Malaysian Leila Azaharri, like Anna Imrie, is exotic, unconventional, remote, fiercely idealistic, courageous, committed, and devotes her profession as a lawyer to championing the poor and victimised. In choosing between the two women, Sandilands faces a similar choice to that of Campbell: marriage to the Scottish nurse means predictable safety and comfort as well as conventionality, mediocrity and compromise; marrying Leila means stepping into dangerous waters and beyond his limitations, as well as being a defiance of prejudice, break from convention, and a challenge to his moral inadequacy. Finally, as in *A Figure of Fun*, the narrative focus of *Leila* stays mostly with the protagonist throughout, until the final passages when narrative access is transferred onto the Scottish nurse, through whose perspective the remainder of the story is presented.

In light of this, it could be argued that Jenkins has here rewritten *A Figure of Fun* through choosing to 'go back' to the 'same essential divisions of loyalty' that Gifford describes.⁹ And yet, despite the prevalent similarities in plot, theme, and narrative structure, there are some differences in emphasis in *Leila*, while Jenkins's exploration of morality and fallibility has alternative resolutions to that of the earlier novel. First of all, the strong political focus of *Leila* and the fact that the democratic elections and the subsequent uprising are based on real events in Brunei history,¹⁰ mean that the novel has a specific historical reference. Within this historical context, Jenkins's critique of British policy in the East becomes more apparent, since in *Leila*, the survival of a traditional, autocratic government is necessary for the continuation of the British presence in Savu, and thus determines British reaction to the protests of Leila's democratic party. As Jenkins has suggested, the double standards of the British, champions of democracy and freedom of speech, were made evident by the turn of events: 'As a British officer confessed to me we were on the wrong side in that nasty little war: British soldiers, Scottish soldiers, sent to crush by force an elected democracy. It was kept well hidden from the British people'.¹¹ The political frame of *Leila*, and the historical facts on which it rests, are therefore crucial to the questions raised in the narrative regarding the morality of British foreign policy, while Jenkins's deployment of these highlight the fact that British imperialism is 'far from exhausted', as Gifford puts it.¹² The political and historical element is much stronger than in *A Figure of Fun*, making Jenkins's exposure of the imperial legacy emerge more clearly and more effectively than in the earlier novel.

In addition, the story of Andrew Sandilands differs from that of Campbell in certain ways. Whereas in *A Figure of Fun*, Campbell shirks away from the challenge represented by Anna Imrie, Sandilands brushes aside all his reservations, even his own colour

prejudice, and marries Leila, although a part of his reason seems to be his sudden need to gain the love and trust of Leila's daughter, Christina. From the outset of their relationship, however, 'there is a feeling of impending doom', as MacDougall comments,¹³ and the tragic death of Christina then sets the tone for subsequent turn of events. As Murray suggests, Sandilands and Leila are 'strikingly mismatched'.¹⁴ While Leila has courage, genuine compassion for the poor, and a 'passion for justice' (L 48), Sandilands is 'conventional and cautious' (L 14) and his sympathy for the poor has always been 'theoretical and distant' (L 58). He is not interested in politics, whereas Leila is fiercely, even fanatically, committed to her party's fight for democracy,¹⁵ so much so that she eventually rejects her husband in favour of martyrdom. And even though he outwardly condemns colour prejudice, Sandilands suffers from it because of his upbringing by a 'bigoted, embittered, vindictive, and unloving' mother (L 98). As a result, his love for Leila, though genuine, is laced with shame; he sees Leila's beauty as 'tainted' (L 11), and finds that 'deep within him aversion lurked', as he thinks of her colour (L 46).¹⁶ And yet, although Sandilands and Leila are not well suited and their relationship ends tragically, Sandilands' marriage to Leila represents a break from convention that Campbell is incapable of; after all, Campbell would never have considered marrying a coloured woman.

More importantly, after overcoming his initial reservations about adopting the daughter of one of Leila's clients, a native woman charged of murder, the persistent determination of Sandilands to keep the girl indicates that he is, indeed—and contrary to his intense self-interrogation—able to overcome his weaknesses. Thus, even if his marriage to Leila has suffered because of his cautious timorousness and sense of inadequacy, his refusal to abandon the plan of taking little Mary to Scotland ultimately manifests his integrity and dedication. As suggested by Binding, therefore, Sandilands' love for both Christina and Mary constitutes his ultimate moral transcendence:

In many ways an unsatisfactory man, Andrew Sandilands, by his love for his stepdaughter (who dies young) and for his adopted daughter from Savu's slums, gives meaning – and a kind of redemption – to ugly times in an ugly world.¹⁷

As opposed to Campbell in *A Figure of Fun*, who is not shown to be fond of coloured children, Jenkins shows Sandilands as genuinely attached to both Christina and Mary. As often in Jenkins's fiction, children are here presented as marking a new beginning in the protagonist's life.

Sandilands' personal development and ultimate resolve thus marks a different direction in Jenkins's investigation of human morality. While both Campbell and Sandilands emerge as rather weak and ineffectual men, it is eventually Sandilands who

proves able to transcend some of his weaknesses, manifested in his valuing the love of a coloured child above the 'practical' advice of his compatriots and friends. In his portrayal of Sandilands, then, and contrary to what appears to be the message of *A Figure of Fun*, Jenkins suggests that it is indeed possible to overcome the limitations that are imposed on us by our nature and environment. But, to achieve this kind of transcendence, it is necessary to have determination as well as to be capable of love, even if love itself is limited.

This said, I would nevertheless agree with Murray's assertion that *Leila* is not one of Jenkins's best novels. True, the narrative access given to Andrew Sandilands through the course of the story, charting his constant self-doubt, self-accusation, self-justification, and 'uncomfortable honesty',¹⁸ means that he is a well-developed and three-dimensional character. This, in Murray's view, is what holds the story together: 'the meticulous self-examinations and self-exculpations are brilliantly rendered, and what keeps the unlikely story fascinating'.¹⁹ However, most of the other main characters, especially Leila herself, are hastily drawn, superficial, and unconvincing. Contrary to Gifford's commendation of Jenkins's 'masterly' study of 'this majestic, complex woman',²⁰ I would suggest that we are never allowed to see beyond the intangible exterior that her alluring beauty, elusiveness, mystery, grace, and untouchable, princess-like appearance, comprise. With no narrative access to Leila's real feelings, motives, and desires, she comes over as unreal, even ethereal, and the reader is never able to engage or empathise with her. Even if she is meant to be a complex character, the exact nature of this complexity is never effectively established. True, she is presented as proud, determined, charitable, forgiving, and humble, but these aspects of her character are mostly revealed through Sandilands' perspective. Given the fact that his unquestioning admiration for Leila verges on idolisation, we are ultimately driven to ask ourselves if Leila is not, in fact, too good to be true.

Endnotes

¹ Douglas Gifford, 'Spring Fiction: Dreams of Love and Justice', *Books in Scotland* 57 (Spring 1996): 13.

² *ibid* 12-13.

³ Jenkins's choice of this name is symbolic as well as ironic. Fidelia's devotion to Archie indicates that her name is representative of her character, while Campbell sees her *fidelity* as undermined by her past sexual history. A character by the name of Fidelia props up again in *Poor Angus*, this time a Filipino former mistress of the protagonist, Angus McAllister. Again, the name has symbolic and ironic overtones, as Fidelia ultimately murders McAllister when he refuses to help her despite her loyalty to him.

⁴ Paul Binding, 'A Calvinist out east', rev. of *Leila*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 1 March 1996: 25.

⁵ Suhayl Saadi, 'Infinite Diversity in New Scottish Writing', *ASLS Web-Site*, proceedings of ASLS Conference 13 May 2000, 6 March 2001 <<http://www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/FrameSet.html>>.

⁶ Gifford, 'Spring Fiction' 13.

⁷ Carl MacDougall, rev. of *Leila*, by Robin Jenkins, *The Herald* 3 February 1996: 14.

⁸ Isobel Murray, rev. of *Leila*, by Robin Jenkins, *Scottish Literary Journal Supplement* 45 (Winter 1996): 60.

⁹ Gifford, 'Spring Fiction' 12.

¹⁰ Jenkins has commented that the events of *Leila* are based on a revolution in Brunei (see Eleanor Morton, 'Easily led by his creations', *The Herald* 12 February 1999: 24). This refers to the armed uprising of Brunei in December 1962, and which also forms the background to the events of *The Holy Tree*. The name of Leila's party (The People's Party) echoes the name of PRB (Brunei People's Party), and, exactly like Leila's party, the PRB had won an overwhelming victory (all seats except one) in the elections to the Legislative Council in 1962. Even Leila's surname, Azaharri, is the same as that of PRB's leader, Sheikh Ahmad M. Azahari. For further information on the uprising, see footnote number 25 to chapter 3 of this section (page 162).

¹¹ Robin Jenkins, letter to the author, 14 December 2000.

¹² Gifford, 'Spring Fiction' 13.

¹³ MacDougall 14.

¹⁴ Murray, rev. of *Leila* 59.

¹⁵ It could be argued that Jenkins based the character of Leila to some extent on Burma's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, whose party won 82 per cent of government seats in the election of 1990, but whose victory has till now been ignored by the Burmese regime. After all, both are Asian women whose political parties have won the majority of government seats in democratic elections, and both are so devoted to their fight for democracy that they are willing to risk their lives for it—though the difference is that Leila eventually gets killed, whereas Suu Kyi has for long been subjected to house arrest by the Burmese regime. However, Jenkins denied my suggestion of a link between Leila and Aung San Suu Kyi: 'The events described in *Leila* did happen, though she is imaginary' (Jenkins, letter to the author, 14 December 2000).

¹⁶ Perhaps, the meaning of Leila's name has a bearing on the way she is presented in the novel, and it could also reflect ironically on Sandilands' underlying colour prejudice. 'Leila' is derived from the Arabic word 'lail', which means 'the night' or 'darkness'. The name is very old and is often associated with beauty, mystery, and allure. These are Leila's qualities that make Sandilands fall in love with her; at the same time, he has an 'instinctive ... aversion to dark skin' (*L* 178). Leila's name is therefore appropriate in the context of their relationship; it symbolises the 'darkness' Sandilands is inherently prejudiced towards, as well as epitomises those qualities that draw him towards Leila. Simultaneously, the meaning of her name reflects on the extent to which the reader and Sandilands are actually kept in the dark regarding her true feelings and motives.

¹⁷ Binding, 'Calvinist out east' 25.

¹⁸ *ibid* 25.

¹⁹ Murray, rev. of *Leila* 59.

²⁰ Gifford, 'Spring Fiction' 13.

Part IV: The Later Scottish Fiction

Chapter 1:

Repetition and Innovation: Irony, Ambivalence, Enigma

In her essay on the 'disruptive' element of Robin Jenkins's fiction, Glenda Norquay argues (in 1993) that his 'recent writing can be seen as both a continuation and a development of his previous work, but in both respects maintaining a disruptive character which is distinctively his own'.¹ Norquay's estimate is that the challenges in Jenkins's work, which operate as a force for disruption, 'emerge more sharply in the period since 1979' and that since then Jenkins has 'both built upon and diverged from his early works'.² This is a very appropriate definition of the directions in which Jenkins's later Scottish narratives have progressed. For example, *Fergus Lamont*, considered as one of Jenkins's most important later developments, and certainly among Jenkins's finest novels, continues the ruthless social analysis that characterises much of his earlier fiction (and his 1950s narratives in particular), emphasising the essentially fragmented nature of Scottish society and the great divergence between social classes in Scotland. Further, *Fergus Lamont* continues the novelist's interrogation of Calvinist morality, and is strongly focused on individual self-deception and self-justification as well as on the conjunction of social idealism and human self-interest. The novel therefore represents a continuation and reiteration of Jenkins's earlier concerns. Simultaneously, *Fergus Lamont* also diverges from the earlier fiction in terms of both narrative technique and narrative approach to these concerns. The first person narrative perspective means that our interpretation of events is entirely dependent upon Fergus's biased vision, so that we are forced to identify with a character we are otherwise inclined to dislike. Simultaneously, Jenkins approaches Fergus and the novel's main issues with an even greater degree of irony than is apparent in his earlier work. Central considerations are presented in more depth, which combined with the narrative perspective and the novel's ironic tone, gives the novel a more ambiguous, even enigmatic, quality.

As regards the main consideration of this thesis, though, an overall pattern has emerged in Jenkins's character portrayals: the pilgrim of conscience is an ever-present figure, through whom Jenkins explores the limits of human moral ability and exposes the hypocrisy of modern society. Although Jenkins's protagonists vary in type, they are most of the time intensely aware of the corrupted morals of their society and haunted by the possibility of being an example of charity and goodness in a fallen world—however suspect their real motives may be. Other protagonists, such as Angus McArthur of *A Love*

of *Innocence*, who are initially obsessed with their perceived superiority and look down upon the lives of ordinary people with contempt, are eventually forced to acknowledge that true human wealth is to be found in what they have hitherto despised and from which they are excluded by their very nature: neighbourly good-will and charity, and a sense of community and human kinship. Despite its moral and spiritual degeneration, humanity is made valuable by the virtues of ordinary people. This central philosophy is prominent also in Jenkins's later Scottish narratives, and the characters presented face similar dilemmas as do Jenkins's earlier protagonists. In this sense, I would argue that the later Scottish fiction does in certain ways repeat Jenkins's previous portrayals. For this reason, my discussion of the individual novels that belong to this latest period will be in somewhat less detail than my treatment of earlier texts.

There are, however, other things to consider here. As I have argued elsewhere,³ my contention is that Jenkins's years abroad, and the novels published as a result of these, represent a temporary deviation from Scotland as setting, during which Jenkins could rethink and reassess his relationship with and conceptions of his native country. His later remark that 'I would need as wide a perspective as possible if I was to go home and see Scotland fresh and truthfully'⁴ indicates at least that he felt the need to leave Scotland in order to be able to view it objectively. Early novels like *The Thistle and the Grail* already imply a negativity and dissatisfaction with Scotland. And the foreign novels themselves frequently paint Scotland in negative light, as for instance through the perspective of the exiled Glaswegian artist John Lynedoch in *The Sardana Dancers*. On the other hand, after returning to Scotland, both physically and fictionally, Jenkins's vision of his home country is more detached and sceptical than before. Although he still emphasises Scottish faults, these are now painted with sharper irony and wit, while the narratives also reveal a more positive acceptance of these shortcomings. Impartiality and compassion—referred to as the 'opposite poles of sympathy and wry distancing' by Manfred Malzahn⁵—are now more delicately balanced. At the same time, and perhaps derived from the aforementioned factors, Jenkins's approach to his favourite issues is marked by deeper ambivalence in the later narratives. In this context, I would argue that Jenkins's travels, as well as his fictional representations of these, are very important to the development of his writing in the sense that his portrayal of Scotland, as well as his moral questioning, have less of the underlying anger, not to say pessimism, that characterises some of his earlier fiction, and more of the playful irony that had already become a hallmark of his writing in the 1950s. Of course, there are exceptions like *Just Duffy*, where bleakness permeates the scene and there seems little hope for humanity.

While Jenkins's later Scottish fiction is characterised both by repetition and increased ambivalence, some of the novels dealt with in this part of the thesis are innovative in terms of plot, structure and form. This is however realised in different ways and by varying degrees. For example, although Jenkins had already used historical events as the background to *Guests of War*, his only 'historical' novel is *The Awakening of George Darroch*, which has as its subject the Disruption of the Scottish Church in 1843 that led to the establishment of the Free Church of Scotland. As Norquay notes, writing about an event which is reduced to a few lines in historical accounts and which has been largely underplayed in fiction is 'a brave departure for the writer'.⁶ Critics have failed to note, though, that Annabel Wedderburn's letters to her sister mean that *The Awakening of George Darroch* is partly written in the epistolary form, which again shows Jenkins breaking from his usual narrative methods. *Fergus Lamont* and *Poverty Castle* are even more obviously innovative, and it could be argued that they reveal a move towards 'postmodern' methods in Jenkins's writing. *Fergus Lamont*, though not Jenkins's first novel with a first person narrative, is different in that it juxtaposes two different time settings within its storyline frame: the story of Fergus's past eventful life, which takes up most of the narrative space, and occasional flash forwards, signalled by passages typed in italics, which relate the present life of the old and impoverished Fergus as he writes his memoirs. Also, comparable to what Gerard Carruthers calls the 'flash forward authorial intrusion' (prolepsis) in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961),⁷ the narrative of Fergus's actual memoirs contains several leaps forward in time which sometimes hint at future events in Fergus's life and the fate of other characters. This technique allows us, for example, to realise early in the novel that Fergus's childhood friends Jock Dempster, Smout McTavish, and Rab McIntyre will later be killed in World War I: 'In time to come Jock was to wear a kilt himself and be killed in it. So were Rab and Smout. Their names are on the Gantock War Memorial' (FL 12). This shows Jenkins breaking his usual habit of laying out his narratives in a straightforward time-sequence where no prior knowledge—except for through suggestive symbolism, imagery and foreshadowing—is given of events to come. *Poverty Castle* presents a similarly significant break from Jenkins's former narrative methods. It is implicitly metafictional, juxtaposing the story of a dying novelist, who wants his last novel to be a 'celebration of goodness' (PC 7), with the actual novel he is writing. The plot of the novel-within-a-novel then deconstructs the preconceived idea of goodness by revealing that life and morality can never be portrayed in such straightforward, binary terms, and thereby questions the ability of fiction itself to do justice to the many complexities and paradoxes of human existence.

An interesting, but less directly innovative, publication is *Lunderston Tales*, a collection of short stories that are united by the setting of Lunderston, a fusion of Largs, Gourock, Dunoon, and the American presence in the Clyde, 'holding them together under the name of the Arran-viewing bay'.⁸ The stories have been compared to John Galt's *Annals of the Parish* (1821),⁹ and focus on diverse people, provosts, shopkeepers, ministers, plumbers, hairdressers, rich widows, golfers, and visiting prostitutes from Glasgow. *Lunderston Tales* are different from Jenkins's only other collection of short fiction, *A Far Cry From Bowmore & Other Stories*, in presenting stories that are all inter-linked through the setting, and through characters that are occasionally mentioned in more than one story. Further, writing *Lunderston Tales* represented a personal challenge for Jenkins: 'Scotland's a dull wee place ... there are no presidents being assassinated, and so forth ... [So] I decided to challenge myself, to see if in ordinary people, ordinary circumstances, you could find something worth writing about'.¹⁰ These sentiments are also expressed in Jenkins's foreword to the book: while suggesting that Scotland's failure to vote for home-rule in the 1979 referendum made it 'a country that, too supine to take itself seriously, does not deserve to be taken seriously by any other country', Jenkins emphasises that nevertheless, 'paradoxically, its individual people are as interesting as any in America or Russia' (*LT*, foreword x). The wide scope of issues dealt with in *Lunderston Tales*, local as well as universal, manifests the validity of Jenkins's assertion. 'A Tinge of Yellow', for example, is an exploration of the moral and emotional implications of colour prejudice, an issue relevant to the world at large. It recalls Jenkins's foreign narratives in its portrayal of the inherently racist Scotsman, who travels to California to see his estranged daughter (who is married to a black American and about to have his child), only to find that he cannot overcome his prejudice. His feelings towards blacks are a mixture of arrogance, disgust, ignorance, self-reproach, and, after meeting his daughter's mother-in-law, lust. As James Robertson comments, Jenkins depicts all these 'with depressing accuracy';¹¹ the protagonist leaves his daughter's house after a short visit, without reconciliation or redemption, knowing but not admitting the moral folly of his sentiments and lacking the 'compassion or the courage to come back' (*LT* 170). Other stories are ironic and witty exposures of sectarian prejudice, the repressed sexuality of extreme Presbyterians (even on their wedding night, the elder sees the merry widow as a 'Filthy temptress' (*LT* 69)), the unfairness of class division, the hypocrisies of democracy, and men's disgruntlement at the increasing numbers of women in their golf club. Jenkins spares neither individuals, organisations, nor politicians in these stories, but there is nevertheless more optimism here, more affection in Jenkins's irony than in many of his other depictions of Scotland. His satirical exposures are laced with playfulness and wit,

and his portrayal of 'small-town smugness'¹² is delicately poised between 'controlled anger',¹³ impartiality, compassion, and humour.

The following chapters will address how Jenkins continues his moral examination through the central pilgrim figure and through other aspects of the narratives discussed. In some cases, like *A Toast to the Lord*, *Fergus Lamont* and *Just Duffy*, the moral questioning is given a particularly Scottish relevance as these novels, in one way or another, explore the impact of Calvinism on Scottish society. In other instances, and often related to the theme of Calvinism, this is focused in presenting extremes of moral (or religious) behaviour, which then are questioned, undermined, or deconstructed through the narrative process. Yet another movement in this group of novels involves the portrayal of the ruthlessly ambitious, egocentric, arrogant, and devious central character that derives from the earlier Angus McArthur of *A Love of Innocence*. In novels like *A Very Scotch Affair*, *Fergus Lamont*, and *Poor Angus*, the protagonist is driven by selfish ambition to betray and hurt people who love him, only to reap bitter rewards in the end when it is too late to make amends for the damage he has caused. These novels emphasise Jenkins's fascination with the moral implications of selfishness, conceit, and self-delusion, while his fiction in general indicates that these are moral shortcomings common to all humanity. At the same time, the novels of this period, and especially some of those published since 1990, seem to be increasingly self-reflective on Jenkins's part, directly or indirectly referring to details or facts that are specific to Jenkins's own life, views, and literary achievement.

Endnotes

- ¹ Glenda Norquay, 'Disruptions: The Later Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*, ed. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) 22.
- ² *ibid* 11-12.
- ³ See Ingibjörg Ágústs dóttir, 'Full Circle: The Function of Place in the Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *Terranglian Territories: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation*, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2000) 179-186.
- ⁴ Robin Jenkins, 'Why I decided Scotland must be seen through fresh and truthful eyes', *Glasgow Herald* 12 October 1982: 11.
- ⁵ Manfred Malzahn, 'Where Extremes Meet in Midfield: The Aesthetics of Robin Jenkins', *Edinburgh Review* 106 (Spring 2001): 44.
- ⁶ Norquay, 'Disruptions' 18.
- ⁷ Gerard Carruthers, 'The Remarkable Fictions of Muriel Spark', *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, eds. Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997) 519.
- ⁸ See Douglas Gifford, 'Summer Fiction: Ambiguities and Ironies', *Books in Scotland* 62 (Summer 1997): 2.
- ⁹ See Gifford, 'Summer Fiction' 2; and Lorn Macintyre, 'Time to salute a hero of this parish', *The Herald* 4 January 1997, sec. Weekend Extra: 14.
- ¹⁰ Personal Interview 14-15.
- ¹¹ James Robertson, 'Seamy but humane', rev. of *Lunderston Tales*, by Robin Jenkins, *Scotland on Sunday* 29 December 1996, sec. Spectrum: 11.
- ¹² Macintyre, 'Time to salute' 14.
- ¹³ Gifford, 'Summer Fiction' 2; and Macintyre, 'Time to salute' 14.

Chapter 2:

Treachery, Escape, and Banishment: *A Very Scotch Affair* (1968) and *Fergus Lamont* (1979)

A Very Scotch Affair and *Fergus Lamont* are in many respects comparable in terms of plot and theme. Both centre on characters that want to escape the restrictive environment of the slums they were brought up in, and whose ambitions for betterment prompt them to betray and hurt people who love them. The developments of Mungo Niven and Fergus Lamont involve a similar pattern of betrayal, escape, and ultimate isolation from their family and background. Perhaps only prefigured by Angus McArthur of *A Love of Innocence*, Mungo and Fergus are in many ways similar characters, as pointed out by Bernard Sellin: 'They have the same ambition, the same background, the same dishonesty under the guise of idealism'.¹ At the same time, Jenkins presents both characters in highly ironic terms. On one hand, their egotistic, arrogant, devious, and deluded sensibility, along with their cruelty towards the people closest to them, have the effect that we, as readers, find them unpleasant and are reluctant to sympathise with them. On the other hand, their sharp understanding of the repressive nature of their society and their determination to rise above its economic and intellectual limitations shows their ability to challenge conventionality and uniformity, and manifests perhaps a sense of value in being true to their own nature. Like Angus McArthur, Mungo and Fergus are not the kind of moral pilgrims that I have classified as being most common in Jenkins's fiction. Although Mungo is more aware of his own faults than Fergus, neither of them actively seek to transcend their moral limitations, and while they have ideals for improving the conditions of the poor, they are far too wrapped up in their self-advancement to be true to these ideals. In the case of *Fergus Lamont*, moreover, the narrative focus rests specifically on Fergus's search for identity, rather than on a personal quest for moral worth. While each narrative raises questions regarding the ambiguous moral significance of the protagonist himself, Jenkins's treatment of morality in both novels, and *Fergus Lamont* in particular, is given a peculiarly Scottish emphasis through his exposure of the fragmented state of Scottish society, the hypocrisies of class division, and the stifling influence of Calvinism and Calvinist morality on Scottish character.

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A Very Scotch Affair is the story of Mungo Niven, a Glaswegian insurance supervisor in his forties who decides to leave his wife and family for the chance to enjoy an easier, more luxurious life in Spain with his wealthy mistress. Like *Fergus Lamont*, *A Very Scotch Affair* has generally been well received and is one of Jenkins's later Scottish novels that

have been covered comparatively extensively in critical studies of his fiction. Glenda Norquay argues that it is one of Jenkins's finest novels and that the author's return to Scottish settings in the story 'appears to have provided Jenkins with a new confidence, a streamlining of his concerns'.² Her various treatments of the novel³ extend specifically to its Scottish dimension, noting, for example, that it is 'second only to *Fergus Lamont* in revealing his [Jenkins's] attitudes to the mind and morality of Scotland'.⁴ On the other hand, while Sellin notes the novel's Scottish significance, especially in the context of Mungo's actual and symbolic links to the city of Glasgow,⁵ his discussion of the novel is more concerned with one of Jenkins's favourite issues, the theme of 'dishonesty and commitment'.⁶ These and other positive treatments of Jenkins's novel differ greatly from a negative *TLS* review, in which the anonymous writer expresses his confusion over how to read the character of Mungo:

Two weeks after a first reading it is too hard to recall more than a few slight instances of what Mungo Niven is supposed to be. [...] He is not embodied enough. His incessant aggrieved interior monologue invites us to sympathize with him; we get signals that we are not meant to, wholly; but he is too little of an objective presence for us to know finally what our view of him is to be.⁷

As I hope to demonstrate in this discussion, the reviewer's confused reading of Mungo arguably reflects the essentially equivocal morality of this complicated character. But his/her confusion also points towards another very important aspect of the novel's moral dimension. This is the apparent establishment of binary opposites which are then, through the novel's irony and through Jenkins's manipulation of plot and narrative perspective, shown to be wholly unreliable, their meaning dependent on from which moral viewpoint we consider characters and events. Thus we could ask questions such as: is Mungo to be judged wholly by his actions, or should we first take other things, such as his wife's vindictive prejudice towards Catholics, into consideration? Any attempt to define the morality of Mungo's actions is not only subject to Jenkins's portrayal of Mungo himself, but also depends on the ways in which other characters, as well as the 'ghetto' from which Mungo makes his escape, are presented in the narrative.

At the beginning of *A Very Scotch Affair*, Jenkins's use of irony indicates Mungo's self-deluded, vainglorious nature. As Mungo discusses his upbringing by his aunt, a 'ragwoman', with his mistress, Myra, Jenkins stresses that Mungo fails to notice the irony of Myra's comment that it was 'a stroke of genius' being brought up the way he was: 'He noticed no irony' (*VSA* 8). It is implied that the manner of Mungo's upbringing now feeds his self-glorifying idealism, since his unconventional childhood fits the image he would want to project of himself as the sensitive, long-suffering hero who fights for social equality and succeeds in escaping the oppressive squalor of the slums. What is even more

telling is Mungo's blindness to the mockery of Myra's remark that she would never believe he cheated at rounders (*VSA* 9). The irony of this fact is intensified in Mungo's reflections that as a child he 'had always been too honourable to cheat, bully, lie, and deceive' (*VSA* 9), whereas, in fact, he is now guilty of lying to and cheating on his wife. Mungo's conceptions of his own worth are thereby presented in sharp contrast to the dubious morals of his actions. Thus Jenkins early establishes a discrepancy between Mungo's self-perceptions, and his actual personality and actions.

Further, through Mungo's self-justifying thoughts as he prepares to leave Bess, he is shown to set himself up both as victim of circumstance and as potential saviour whose example of rising above the commonplace would inspire others to break away from the ghetto habit of acceptance and non-ambition. Thus, while genuinely repelled by his wife's obesity and sloppiness, Mungo blames her for degrading him and stifling his intellectual ambitions by making 'a joke, a toy, out of ... [his] very soul' (*VSA* 59). Simultaneously, he justifies his treachery of his family by persuading himself that he is, in a manner relating to Calvinist ideas of election and grace, one of those 'agents of God' (*VSA* 61) who are each given specific parts to play for the betterment of humanity:

Trying hard to be sincere and humble, he considered what his own part might be. It could be that he was to put his children to the test. [...] if he fled with Myra ... they would be shocked into seeing not only him differently, but themselves and their mother. That hardening of vision which soon or late blinded most would have been prevented or at any rate delayed in them. They might suffer but it would redeem them.

There would be lesser repercussions. Colleagues at work ... would suddenly, as they gazed up at the cold dark sky or down at the dirty slush, start wondering. For the rest of their lives they would have learned that no man was completely knowable and therefore completely consumable, to be thrown away like a paper hankie; most importantly, each of them would have learned it about himself. [...]

Yes, much depended on him. If he shrank back now, no one would be saved; all, including Bess herself, would sink deeper into the morass. (*VSA* 62)

In this manner, Mungo elevates an act of heartless cruelty into an act of nobility and courage. Like Fergus later imagines himself as the future saviour of Gantock, Mungo would like to believe that breaking free of his restrictive environment, regardless of the method by which this is done, will encourage his family and other slum-dwellers to seek an alternative outside the strictures of the reality within which they operate.

Perhaps, in Mungo's ideal world, this would be the end result of his actions. In the real world, however, they cause mainly hurt, confusion, anxiety and anger. Mungo's neighbours are certainly not shocked into following his example of non-conformity. Rather, with very few exceptions, they condemn him for his callous treatment of mortally ill Bess. Naturally, Bess's popularity contributes to the neighbours' condemnation of

Mungo, but it is nevertheless clear that he is seen to have violated basic laws of moral responsibility. True, Mungo is already before his betrayal seen as ‘a monster of selfishness and duplicity’ by Florence McTaggart (*VSA* 9), as a ‘big pompous fraud’ by Alec Fraser (*VSA* 19), and as ‘an insincere bastard’ by one of his subordinates (*VSA* 21). Significantly, he is also seen as a ‘desperate’ hypocrite by his daughter Peggy (*VSA* 48), and thought of by his son Andrew with a mixture of ‘hate and sympathy’ (*VSA* 36). But his abandonment of his family means that people are no longer willing to make allowances for his shortcomings. And while his example does appear to prompt Andrew and Peggy to escape the ghetto, it only reveals Andrew as taking after his father’s callousness when abandoning his pregnant Catholic girlfriend, and Peggy as sacrificing her education—and thereby her chance of escaping the ghetto through intellectual merit—and taking a lowly job as a mother’s help in America, something that Mungo himself certainly does not approve of. Ultimately, it seems that Mungo’s self-justifying thoughts of being a source of inspiration are based on vanity and self-delusion.

Jenkins’s portrayal of Mungo’s callousness, selfishness, and self-justification, as well as the picture drawn of the family’s and neighbours’ reaction to his escape, would then seem to encourage our dislike and condemnation of the protagonist. Jenkins’s juxtaposition of Mungo’s unpopularity with Bess’s cheerfulness, sense of humour, common sense, and popularity among neighbours and friends further underlines this negative image of Mungo. Also, Bess’s undying love for Mungo and her refusal to condemn him for his treatment of her establishes Bess as being both faithful and forgiving. In this sense, Bess and Mungo are presented as opposites, and can be seen as representing the binaries of kindness and cruelty, virtue and wickedness.

However, as is typical of Jenkins’s fictional world, things are not so straightforward. Even though Mungo is presented in an extremely bad light, he experiences moments of intense self-awareness and self-blame that invite us to feel some sympathy for him. As opposed to Fergus Lamont, who never really acknowledges his selfishness and arrogance, Mungo—reminiscent of Jonathan Broxmead of *The Sardana Dancers*, for example—is allowed some understanding of his own weaknesses. For example, when Mungo tells Bess that he is serious about leaving her, he questions his previous belief that she has caused his degradation. His thoughts indicate that it is, in fact, his own selfishness that is to blame:

It was unbearable. She was his enemy who had degraded him; yes, but she had loved him, and perhaps still did. Could love, other than self-love, ever be degrading? Had he blamed her for a degradation that had been inevitable? (*VSA* 80)

Nevertheless, this early moment in Mungo's development merely shows him questioning his own motives. As often with Jenkins's protagonists, tragedy is necessary for full self-confrontation, which in Mungo's case comes after Bess has died and he has returned to his old home for her funeral. Formerly contemptuous of the triviality and ignorance of the ghetto community, he now realises that he is guilty of something even more fundamental than adultery and betrayal:

Now, confronted by Beatrice [Bess's sister], he saw it clearly, and was afraid. These faces, familiar, commonplace, and stupid, were suddenly seen to be nevertheless of great value, in a way he could never have explained; and any explanation would have been regarded by the minds behind those faces with suspicion and distrust, for in that vision of them he by no means bestowed on them qualities they did not have. They were valuable as they were, with all their imperfections; and the most valuable, to him, was now lost forever. (*VSA* 172)

Like Andrew Doig in *The Missionaries*, and Michael Eking in *The Holy Tree*, Mungo realises the value of human kinship and community, sensing that what binds humanity together is its shared moral shortcomings. But whereas Andrew Doig's realisation seems lasting, Mungo's is only a vision that will fade and not really alter his attitude: 'So for a few moments he saw; but he knew that, very soon, his mind dark again, he would despise them even more as typical creatures of the ghetto' (*VSA* 172). Yet these moments of truth encourage the reader to empathise with Mungo, regardless of his arrogance, deceit, and treachery.

Other aspects of the novel prevent us from judging Mungo altogether negatively. For instance, despite her good qualities, Bess she is shown to be virulently prejudiced against Catholics, condemning Andrew's pregnant Catholic girlfriend, Ishbel McKenzie, to disgrace, unhappiness and poverty by refusing to agree to their marriage, and thereby assisting Andrew in his callous scheme to desert Ishbel. It emerges therefore that Bess is no angel herself; she is perfectly capable of being cruel to other people regardless of their misery and desperation. While Bess's prejudiced vision is emphasised through her words that she would 'raither see him [Andrew] deid' before marrying Ishbel, Mungo himself is shown as tolerant and open-minded, harbouring no apparent prejudice towards Catholics and even suggesting to Bess that marriage to Ishbel might make their son happy (*VSA* 79). In this way, the narrative reveals the ambiguity and complexity of the characters' morality, and keeps the reader from making definite moral judgements of the protagonist.

Bess's friend, Florence McTaggart, is further important in this respect. She has a 'vitriolic detestation' of Mungo (*VSA* 109) and holds the opinion that forgiveness—such as Bess's of Mungo—is 'almost as unforgivable as the wrong it forgave' (*VSA* 112). Her vindictive, unforgiving, and prejudiced nature certainly demonstrates that Mungo is not the

only severely flawed character in the novel, and in many respects she even compares unfavourably with Mungo. While Mungo at least never denies his callousness, Florence disguises what is really her bitterness and spite as being an example of moral superiority. This is revealed most clearly during her campaign of collecting ‘support for the condemnation of [Mungo] Niven’ (*VSA* 121). The passages describing this campaign (Part 1, Chapter 14) are among the most poignant in the novel. Florence is deeply offended at anyone who refuses to condemn Mungo for his actions, and thinking herself a true Christian, she vows never again to attend the church services of Reverend Brewster even though the minister has merely reminded her of Christ’s preaching of forgiveness and tolerance. Placing herself on the moral high-ground, seen for instance in her statement that ‘the best of us saw through him [Mungo]’ (*VSA* 124), her willingness to throw the first stone reveals her hypocrisy and self-righteousness. The scene with Councillor Carmichael subtly implies that Florence’s regular church attendance does not necessarily mean that she is a true Christian. Carmichael points out the dangers of Florence’s rancour towards Mungo:

‘You’re letting dislike run awa’ wi’ you, woman. Take care it doesnae drap you at the feet of the deil.’

She gasped at that: she, a kirk-goer, threatened by a known atheist. (*VSA* 123)

Individual morality does not depend on external classifications such as ‘church-goer’ or ‘atheist’, Jenkins suggests. Rather, this depends on the individual capacity to show understanding, compassion and forgiveness. True moral superiority is to be found in those people, such as Rev. Brewster, Big Aird, and Maggie Ralston, who refuse to condemn Mungo and reject Florence’s campaign.

A Very Scotch Affair affirms the centrality of Jenkins’s philosophy that there is ‘no absolute truth; things do keep shifting’.⁸ Councillor Carmichael’s comment that ‘the truth’s not so simple’ (*VSA* 123) encapsulates the novel’s central suggestion about human morality: it is complex and ambiguous, and human behaviour can rarely be seen in terms of black and white. Instead of being purely good or purely evil, people are a mixture, and even then their wickedness and virtue are not easily distinguishable from one another. Or, as Sellin suggests:

People are not all of a piece. They are not even made of two parts that can easily interlock, Jenkins seems to suggest. The jigsaw puzzle does not fit. At the core of Jenkins’ world then is an immense fracture that runs deep. Reality is always split.⁹

The idea of complexity and of a shifting or ‘split’ reality applies most of all to the character of Mungo, as is indicated in Sellin’s argument:

Mungo Niven is a problematic character, a round complex character who can be at the same time a lecherous egotist and a man sincerely concerned with the degradation of culture and environment in an increasingly materialistic world.¹⁰

Even if Mungo is 'almost too bad to be true',¹¹ as Moira Burgess comments, we are not allowed to settle into 'a secure and comfortable judgmental opinion' of him.¹² After all, Mungo's decision to leave his wife springs from genuine despair at the economical and ideological restrictions of his environment and from an ambition to rise above these; living off his mistress is simply Mungo's only available means of survival outside the ghetto. Presented as the most intelligent of the family, Peggy Niven understands her father's need to break free of the ghetto; her 'guilty sympathy' for Mungo originates in her knowledge that 'she too was a traitor, ready to escape when the chance came' (*VSA* 85). The underlying suggestion is that, despite his cruelty towards his wife, Mungo's challenging of his repressive environment is, in fact, courageous and valuable in a way that most of his family and neighbours are unable to comprehend. In Norquay's words, Mungo's unpleasantness is accordingly closely related to 'a paradoxical sense of value and worth':

... in deciding to leave his dying wife and adolescent family ... Mungo is betraying basic moral obligations. But in fulfilling his lifelong ambitions, he is casting off the restrictions that have been imposed by his Calvinistic society and by the material restrictions of his environment. Although his departure may have been responsible for the death of his wife, he is actually making an affirmation of his life, in the sense of enriching his experience and remaining true to his own nature. He may not fully succeed, but the value is in the attempt.¹³

The central paradox of Mungo's position is that in order to escape his social background and enrich his experience it is necessary—as it is later for Fergus Lamont—to be ruthless and reckless. The value of Mungo's escape is thereby undermined through the means by which it is effected.

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Fergus Lamont has been referred to as one of Jenkins's more sophisticated works,¹⁴ as his 'most mature novel',¹⁵ and Jenkins himself has named it as his possibly 'most ambitious book'.¹⁶ The novel marks a new direction in the novelist's development of narrative techniques, and shows him at his most sophisticated in his tackling of moral issues and Scottish identity. It examines the nature of Scottish identity and the fragmented Scottish psyche in some detail, mainly through its ambiguous protagonist, who, in his complexities, becomes almost a symbol for this very fragmentation or, at least, an ironic parody of the duality of Scottishness. Jenkins uses here more poignantly than before the conflicts created by social circumstances within one character. Fergus's ambiguous approach to his life as aristocrat, his constant referring to his working class background, and his poetry which has

life in the slums as a main theme all suggest that the protagonist is torn between several different aspects of his society. Since Fergus eventually has to accept that privileged life does not necessarily bring him more happiness, and ultimately retreats into obscurity and poverty, with his poetry more or less swept under the carpet by critics and forgotten by most people except himself, his life as aristocrat, and even his aspirations to be a great poet, could arguably be read as dissociated aspects of Fergus's personality, and Fergus himself as both a social and intellectual schizophrenic. Furthermore, Fergus's abandonment of his working class background and his social climb come to epitomise Calvinist concepts of election and grace, while his narrative highlights the morally suspect nature of Calvinist ideology, as well as emphasises Fergus's own hypocrisy and moral righteousness. The novel is filled with comic detail, delicately focused in its ironic evocation of Scottish life and mentality, and mature in its portrayal of moral and social ambivalence.

Most critics agree as to the qualities of *Fergus Lamont*. Roderick Watson claims that the novel is Jenkins's 'most virulent and ambivalent account of cultural life and spiritual failure in Scotland',¹⁷ while Isobel Murray and Bob Tait suggest that it is a 'peculiarly twentieth-century' and Scottish 'variant on [Dickens's] *Great Expectations*'.¹⁸ Similarly, Norquay quotes *Fergus Lamont* as 'a deeply mocking response to images of Scottishness',¹⁹ in which Jenkins's fictional techniques 'are deployed in such a way that the scope of his enquiries extends beyond the metaphysical and acquires a political and national dimension, allowing the techniques of disruption to work towards a more focused end'.²⁰ However, some critics have found fault with the novel, seeing the figure of Fergus either as 'implausible, both in his inward and outward aspects',²¹ or as too 'irredeemably egotistical' for the reader to maintain interest in his career.²² Yet these are merely aspects of Fergus that contribute further to his ambiguity, establish him as a very complex character, and add considerably to the novel's ironic quality. It is also surprising that someone who obviously admires *The Changeling*, should criticise this novel for being 'ruinously spoiled by stagey unrealities, bursts of resumé or monologue instead of enacted scenes, and sheerly slack writing'.²³ *Fergus Lamont* is by no means characterised by slack writing; on the contrary, one of its main strengths is its narrative style, clearly considered in every detail, and the shifts between the past memoirs and present life of Fergus are given determined precision. And what David Craig interprets as 'stagey unrealities' are merely the ironic representations of the various episodes of Fergus's life, episodes that have been obscured and distorted through Fergus's very biased and arrogant vision. The reader is not meant to be comfortable about this conceited, vainglorious, hypocritical, and deluded character, but this fact is one of many that give the novel its quality.

Fergus Lamont is presented as different from other people in his native Gantock

(Gourock) already in the novel's first chapters. For example, the short time with his mother leaves Fergus wearing the kilt, a symbol of upper class life that instantly sets him apart from others. Moreover, by wearing the kilt, Fergus chooses to side with his mother against those who persecuted and led her to her death: 'I chose the kilt. It was like choosing my mother. From that day on I never wore trousers' (*FL* 26). Through Fergus, Jenkins emphasises clearly how great Fergus's distinction already is from his surroundings: 'I had seen boys in kilts before, toffs from the villa'd West End, as remote from us in tenemented Lomond Street as the whites in South Africa are from the blacks' (*FL* 2). While Fergus's consistent wearing of the kilt has been analysed as a 'poetic parody of his Scottishness',²⁴ it also establishes an immense paradox in what it does for Fergus's personal identity. In one sense, the kilt reinforces Fergus's national identity since the kilt is, after all, a piece of dress characteristic of Scotland, while it also 'breaks the natural congruence and makes Fergus search for his supposedly real identity',²⁵ as argued by Malzahn. On the other hand, the kilt also establishes Fergus as a snob, moves him further towards an upper-class awareness, and thus arguably away from the hard-core 'Scottishness' of his working class environment. As a result, Fergus has simultaneously become *more* Scottish and *less* so, and this unusual dichotomy of identity clearly indicates an early duality in his character.

As Fergus sets out on his journey up the social ladder, hoping one day to be acknowledged as rightful heir to the Earl of Darndaff, he becomes increasingly distanced from his native Gantock. As he realises, his social ascent will mean rejecting his background altogether and hurting the feelings of people who have been good to him. Fergus's readiness to do exactly this shows how concerned he is with personal advancement: after leaving home, he considers it to be 'imperative' and 'strategically necessary' (*FL* 95, 96) to his career to cut off all contact with family and friends. Already, Fergus's biased vision depicts the society in which he lives as essentially fragmented, dual in nature, its relative parts irreconcilable to one another. His move away from the slums to the world of the upper classes is therefore a taking of sides between mutually exclusive components of Scottish society, an assumption of one kind of identity over the other. Even as a boy, Fergus's perspective emphasises this very duality of society, showing the Scotland of the boys his own age as totally different from the Scotland he considers as rightfully his:

They had no pride or imagination. They were content to become shipyard workers. Theirs was by birth the Scotland of tenements and low-paid jobs. Mine was the Scotland of castles, famous families, and heroic deeds. (*FL* 59)

In Fergus's memoirs, the ten years of happiness in the Hebridean idyll of East Gerinish with Kirstie, the pipe-smoking Celtic princess who dresses like a man, are related

in a tone of tenderness and deep regret, and this part of the novel shows Fergus at his most content. Because neither aristocracy nor working class feature much in this setting, it emerges as a sort of crossover between the two, where Fergus can finally achieve some stability. Fergus's relationship with Kirstie demonstrates how far he is capable of loving somebody, and even though their love is flawed,²⁶ Fergus's narrative sounds more genuine and consistent than before, providing us with a refreshing change of approach, and, for a change, shifting from Fergus's constant egocentric self-praise to a touching homage of love to an eccentric island woman. But although Kirstie and the peaceful surroundings of East Gerinish do bring out the best in Fergus, he is far from being purged of his selfishness and arrogance by the time he returns to Glasgow. The episode of his journey back clearly reveals that he is no less self-obsessed and arrogant than he was before East Gerinish. Thus, while wanting his suitcase carried and other related privileges given him, Fergus, in his self-delusion, thinks that his readiness to forgive and sympathise with the people who cannot do him these services manifests his 'forbearance' and 'philanthropic graciousness' (*FL* 315). This is one of many examples of Fergus's illusions about his own qualities and achievements. Time and again, he perceives himself as morally or socially righteous, while the ironic ambiguity of the narrative frequently works to give the reader an entirely different impression. Fergus's self-illusionary vision emphasises the complexity of his character, and may often confuse the reader in his or her appreciation of him, and of other characters presented through Fergus's narrative. Most importantly, though, it shows us how Fergus himself is caught between illusion and reality, and how these have a great bearing on the conflict within his person.

Ironically, Fergus's role as poet adds to the ambiguities in his character, and the poet in him is arguably another manifestation of a multiply split psyche, with Fergus the poet dissociated from Fergus the social climber. As the question of truth is presented in close relation to Fergus's reflections on poetry, the split between the gentleman and the poet becomes increasingly explicit. One of Fergus's initial questions which relate to the role of poetry is whether there is 'a contradiction between truth and gentlemanliness' (*FL* 65)—asked when Fergus is harshly criticised by his teacher for using the word 'fart' in an essay. All the way through his experience as a gentleman, Fergus has to contend with this contradiction, since 'truth' can only be expressed in certain ways, and with words not compatible with the refinement of aristocrats. Accordingly, Fergus the poet has great difficulty reconciling himself with Fergus the aristocrat. Fergus's reflections on his renunciation of Mary Holmscroft during the war emphasise this idea:

As an officer of the king, I ought to have disapproved of her as a traitress giving assistance to his enemies; and I did disapprove of her for that. Also, as an aristocrat, I deprecated her excessive passion, and her vulgar

assumption that she was right and virtuous, and those who disagreed with her wrong and wicked. At the same time, as a poet and seer, I felt in my heart that it was necessary, for the salvation of humanity, that there should be some voices—not too many—raised in condemnation not only of the present war but of all wars. (*FL* 97)

In fact, Fergus refers to 'the poet in me' (*FL* 64), almost as if he is talking of another person. Through his role as poet, therefore, the ambiguity of and conflicts within Fergus are brought even more into the open.

Fergus, though an outsider at the end, provides a more or less all-inclusive portrait of Scottish society, having come into contact with the depravity of the urban slums, middle-class respectability (being a fee-payer at the Academy after inheriting his grandfather's money), the extravagant and luxurious lifestyle of the landed gentry during his life with Betty T. Shields, and the hard yet healthy lifestyle of Gaelic-speaking Highland farmers and crofters. Fergus's climb up the social ladder and his ultimate degradation into poverty and obscurity, referred to by Malzahn as a 'picaresque journey through society',²⁷ not only shows a kind of 'apocalyptic reversion' to his origins,²⁸ but also makes of him a curious representative of every social class he comes into touch with. In this respect, Fergus comes to epitomise Scotland itself, and his torn social outlook thus reflects the struggle between the respective hierarchies of Scottish society. Fragmentation and paradox are key ideas here; nothing within Fergus's mind represents wholeness or consistency. Quite significantly, Fergus comments satirically on the political dependence of Scotland on England when describing his obedience to his wife: 'I had to submit [to Betty]. Like Scotland I was not yet ready for independence' (*FL* 178). Economically dependent on Betty, split between his background and what he aspires to become, between condemnation of Calvinist ideology and the actual demonstration of its attitudes, Fergus *is* Scotland, his linguistic and ideological conflicts symbolising the linguistic and ideological contradictions of Scottish society.

The most important aspect of the novel when dealing with Fergus's dual or fragmented personality is the influence of Calvinism on Fergus and his society. Jenkins's treatment of Calvinism highlights the novelist's moral and social questioning, stressing the stifling influence of Calvinist doctrine on Scottish intellectual life. The paradox in Fergus's reactions to Calvinism is made apparent at the beginning of the novel, when Fergus announces: 'Puritanic and parochial Scots, you murdered my young and beautiful mother. As one of you, I must share the blame' (*FL* 1). While accusing those who condemned his mother for her 'sins', making it clear that a narrow-mindedness derived from Calvinist principles is a force that brought about her death, Fergus also indicates that he is partly to blame himself, since he is not innocent of this way of thinking. Despite his dislike of

Calvinism, Fergus has not been able to escape its influence. Fergus's announcement is further significant in clearly criticising Scottish mentality. Through Fergus, Scottish society is seen as poisoned and unnecessarily controlled by strict tenets of Calvinism. Calvinism is therefore a destructive force in Scotland, as pointed out by Norquay:

This is connected in the novel with the self-destructiveness of Scottish morality: in attempting to create a national identity by clinging to a fierce and unforgiving Calvinist morality, Scotland annihilates its own capacity to love, to forgive, to grow.²⁹

Even in East Gerinish, Fergus comes up against this 'tyranny of the spirit'³⁰ in the character of the local minister: 'He had once knocked off the head of a cock with his stick because he had caught it treading a hen on the Sabbath' (*FL* 261). This, Fergus feels, represents 'that mixture of sanctified lust and hypocrisy which had soiled and stunted the soul of Scotland for centuries' (*FL* 261-262). The moral rigidity of Calvinism puts 'righteousness before love' (*FL* 269), and regards no one as innocent, 'not even a new-born baby' (*FL* 270).

Jenkins's critical treatment of Calvinism in *Fergus Lamont* is given further pertinence in the character of Fergus's grandfather. Donald McGilvray's rejection of his daughter leaves a permanent mark on Fergus and reverberates through the novel as one of the most scathing examples of Calvinist vindictiveness. In McGilvray's opinion, his daughter has sinned so as to be irredeemable, and not even after her death can he forgive her:

My grandfather did not allow my mother to be buried in her own mother's grave; nor did he go to the funeral. He displayed atrocious callousness; yet, by the sheer effrontery of faith, he compelled most people to think of him as a Christian of formidable and magnificent staunchness. (*FL* 31)

Significantly, while repeatedly criticising his grandfather's Calvinist mentality, Fergus has to acknowledge its influence on him: 'There were times, too many of them, when I found myself thinking like my grandfather' (*FL* 78). This essential paradox is seen in the moment when he rejects his son Torquil, a scene which clearly establishes Fergus's similarity with his grandfather, although in this case Fergus does not have religion as his excuse:

The major differences between Fergus's situation and his grandfather's are that his grandfather's harshness was abetted by a genuine belief in a harsh and unforgiving creed, against which his daughter had openly sinned: Fergus has no such faith, only his endless interest in himself and an unwillingness to be otherwise interested, and he certainly has nothing to forgive.³¹

It seems appropriate to the paradoxes in Fergus's character, that the scene of rejecting Torquil is described just after Fergus breaks off from his narrative of life in East Gerinish where he had been criticising his grandfather's rejection of his mother. As a result, it becomes obvious that Fergus represents precisely those aspects of Scottish society that he criticises, and thus the person 'who throughout the narrative castigates the Scots for the

narrow-mindedness, parochialism and self-seeking, is himself the most “archetypal” Scot of all’.³²

It is evident that Calvinism is a central concept in *Fergus Lamont*, and this, added to the fact that both novels have first person narrators whose ambiguous narratives are told in voices which are apparently honest yet are clearly self-deceiving, works to show affinities with James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). There are further similarities between the two stories that are directly related to this central concern with Calvinism, and the moral implications it carries. Like Hogg’s novel, *Fergus Lamont* emphasises the folly of a self-assigned sense of grace that leads to notions of absolute justification when the person in question sees his or her actions as guarding a cause which—supposedly—is morally just or in some way works for the common good of society. Besides believing strongly in his social distinction—that he is an aristocrat by birth—Fergus is convinced that there is an unconquerable greatness in him, an invulnerability that will, for example, protect him from being killed in the war:

... I felt I had a greatness in me, too valuable to be lost. I had no idea what supernatural power was interested in preserving me, but all the time, whether in safe billet behind the lines or on a night raid or going over the top, I was sustained by that strong assurance of deserved immunity.

... When the danger was greatest the voice within me reassuring me was at its most convincing. ...

The men in my company called me anointed. They intended sarcasm and achieved truth. (*FL* 110)

Comparable to Agnes Tolmie in *A Toast to the Lord*, Fergus views his immunity as derived from some kind of spiritual source. Although not specifically identified as a Calvinist God, its powers of protection are parallel to the God Agnes places her trust in. Fergus conceives himself as superior, as in a state of grace shared by the chosen few; the rest have little hope of redemption. Importantly, Fergus sees his position as a gentleman in similar terms. He sees aristocrats as the elect and therefore justified in their wealth and luxurious life-style. Jenkins describes this perspective with typical sarcasm:

As gentry, we took for granted that we were owed the best of everything, not just because we were personally worthy of it, but also because that was how the Almighty had arranged things. It seemed to us a sacred and sensible arrangement, and any attempt to alter it would be impious and foolish. (*FL* 152)

The concept of religious election has become translated into a kind of social election, in which material and social prestige represent grace as given by a Calvinist God, as Margery McCulloch points out: ‘Calvin’s *religious* Elect have been replaced ... by a belief in an *aristocratic* election which provides the justification for his [Fergus’s] actions’.³³ In fact, Fergus maintains throughout his narrative that by eventually returning to

Gantock, bringing the glory of his social and literary victories with him, he will more than make up for his rejection of those he grew up amongst. Similar to Mungo Niven's thoughts on being an example to other ghetto-dwellers in *A Very Scotch Affair*, Fergus believes that his intended success as an aristocrat and poet will somehow be a source of inspiration for his native Gantock. He plans to return there as an 'absolver and redeemer' (*FL* 134), and thereby bring his 'honour and fame as tributes' (*FL* 96). As argued by Murray and Tait, this aspect of Fergus's outlook establishes his significance as one of the elect, since his ambition to bring spiritual meaning to the people of Gantock shows his task as that of being the 'future saviour of Gantock and its slums'.³⁴ The breaking of former personal attachments is completely justifiable because Fergus thinks that his success as a social climber will make of him an example for the poor:

Fergus seems to believe that he can in some way help Gantock by becoming an aristocrat in order to demonstrate how one can fight from poverty and the degrading slums towards riches. It is as if by his mere return and presence Gantock will be reformed.³⁵

Accordingly, Fergus's unscrupulous actions are presented as 'justified' by the actual effect he hopes to achieve on his return to the Gantock slums. In this sense, Fergus has become a 'justified sinner', possessing an Antinomian sense of social election, and convinced of his own righteousness in his cruel dismissal of the Lamonts and others for the sake of protecting his reputation among aristocrats. At the same time, Jenkins's use of ambiguous irony underscores Fergus's essentially split or fragmented state of mind. To an extent, Fergus is in a state of schizophrenia. He is three persons within one mind: the boy who was raised in the slums, thinking back with mixed feelings of tenderness, regret, and horror; the gentleman, conforming to what he sees as behavioural codes of aristocrats, supporting and even exaggerating their callous attitudes towards socialists and the lower classes of society; the poet, desirous to achieve truth through his poetry yet failing to impress the subjects of his poems or represent his 'truth' in real life. While Jenkins portrays the structure of Scottish society as essentially disintegrated, Fergus's odyssey through this society's various components leaves him fundamentally torn, and ultimately a lonely and bitter old man living in obscurity in a room-and-kitchen somewhere in Glasgow, an outsider in his own country who has adopted the name of a dead friend (William—or Smout—McTavish), and who is unable to assume a real sense of identity. The gentleman and the poet are eventually perceived as 'unreal' aspects of his character, as temporary 'dissociations' of his original working class persona.

Endnotes

- ¹ Bernard Sellin, 'Commitment and Betrayal: Robin Jenkins' *A Very Scotch Affair*', *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996) 101.
- ² Glenda Norquay, 'Against Compromise: The Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *Cencrastus* 24 (1986): 5.
- ³ See Norquay, 'Against Compromise' 5-6; Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins, and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985, 284-293; Norquay, 'Four Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s', *History of Scottish Literature* vol. 4, ed. Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1989) 272-273; Norquay, 'Robin Jenkins', *British Novelists Since 1960*, ed. Jay L. Halio, vol. 14 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1983) 437.
- ⁴ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 286.
- ⁵ Sellin, 'Commitment and Betrayal' 107-108. As Sellin states, Mungo's Christian name is no coincidence: it refers to St Mungo, the patron saint of Glasgow, who was a wandering monk who built a chapel on the site of what would later become the city of Glasgow.
- ⁶ *ibid* 104.
- ⁷ 'Disembodied', rev. of *A Very Scotch Affair*, *Times Literary Supplement* 18 July 1968: 745.
- ⁸ Robin Jenkins, interview, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', by Glenda Norquay, Ph.D., University of Edinburgh, 1985, 443.
- ⁹ Sellin, 'Commitment and Betrayal' 103.
- ¹⁰ *ibid* 102.
- ¹¹ Moira Burgess, 'Robin Jenkins: A Novelist of Scotland', *Library Review* 22:8 (1970): 411.
- ¹² Isobel Murray, 'One Toe in Eden Still: Robin Jenkins' Fiction', *Scottish Review* 38 (1985): 94.
- ¹³ Norquay, 'Robin Jenkins' 437.
- ¹⁴ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 304.
- ¹⁵ Beth Dickson, 'Paperback Fiction: Boxes Within Boxes', *Books in Scotland* 35 (1991): 12.
- ¹⁶ From an unpublished part of Personal Interview, 21 March 1997.
- ¹⁷ Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (London: Macmillan, 1984) 454.
- ¹⁸ Isobel Murray and Bob Tait, *Ten Modern Scottish Novels* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1984) 196-197.
- ¹⁹ Norquay, 'Against Compromise' 6.
- ²⁰ Glenda Norquay, 'Disruptions: The Later Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) 16.
- ²¹ Paul Binding, 'Ambivalent Patriot: The Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *New Edinburgh Review* 53 (1981): 22.
- ²² Marshall Walker, *Scottish Literature Since 1707* (London: Longman, 1996) 322.
- ²³ David Craig, rev. of *Fergus Lamont*, by Robin Jenkins, and *On the Island*, by Iain Crichton Smith, *Cencrastus* 2 (Spring 1980): 39.
- ²⁴ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 311.
- ²⁵ Manfred Malzahn, *Aspects of Identity: The Contemporary Scottish Novel (1978-1981) as National Self-Expression* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984) 108.
- ²⁶ See Murray and Tait 215. Murray and Tait suggest that 'the love of Fergus and Kirstie is very real, and very flawed, and yet presented as very valuable'. They also argue that Fergus's arrogance in this relationship is trivial, compared to his cruelty of refusing to give Kirstie a child (216).
- ²⁷ Malzahn, *Aspects of Identity* 112.
- ²⁸ Craig, rev. of *Fergus Lamont* 39.
- ²⁹ Norquay, 'Disruptions' 17.
- ³⁰ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 313.
- ³¹ Murray and Tait 217.
- ³² Norquay, 'Four Novelists' 274.
- ³³ Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'Hogg's *Justified Sinner* and Robin Jenkins's *Just Duffy*', *Studies in Hogg and his World* 6 (1995): 16.
- ³⁴ Murray and Tait 197.
- ³⁵ Friðgeir Jónasson, 'Fergus Lamont: 'Absolver and Redeemer'?: Elements of the Split Scottish Psyche in Robin Jenkins's *Fergus Lamont*', BA essay, University of Iceland, 1993, 9.

Chapter 3:

Pushing to Extremes: *A Toast to the Lord* (1972), *A Would-Be Saint* (1978), *The Awakening of George Darroch* (1985), and *Just Duffy* (1988)¹

A Toast to the Lord, *A Would-Be Saint*, *The Awakening of George Darroch*, and *Just Duffy* emphasise once more Jenkins's preoccupation with morality and the value of religion. Although these novels vary considerably in terms of storyline and setting, they are comparable in their portrayal of ambiguous protagonists whose unconventional, extreme behaviour and actions isolate them from their society and render them incomprehensible, even unpleasant, to other characters and the reader. Agnes Tolmie, Gavin Hamilton, George Darroch, and Duffy all inhabit an almost fabulistic or mythic realm of extremes: their moral and/or religious stance rejects compromise and challenges the mediocre morality of their society, where charity and self-denial are disregarded in favour of material comfort and respectability, and where the majority pay only lip-service to the moral and social teachings of Christ. Initially, by creating these characters, whose apparent un-blinking faith, charity, virtue, and prodigious awareness of human cruelty and immorality, stand in sharp contrast with the 'halfway house' ethics of their community, Jenkins forces an understanding of the corrupt morals of politicians, the Church, and society in general. And yet, as the stories progress, doubt is cast on each protagonist's moral or spiritual value, so that we eventually have to question their motives: Are they genuine or false? Are they based on moral and spiritual superiority or do they generate from pride, stubbornness, and attention-seeking? Are they merely manifestations of insanity? As each character is pushed further towards extremes in terms of their behaviour and social interaction, the reader can no longer identify or sympathise with their actions. Thus, while Jenkins's portrayal of extremes forces a recognition of the moral and spiritual lassitude of our world, his deeply ironic and ambivalent approach to the central characters in these novels ultimately subverts any former indication of their moral and/or spiritual value. In this respect, we can detect a deconstructive element in all four texts; they originally appear to establish a system of superior ethical or religious values (the absolutes of goodness and spirituality) which are then undermined, questioned, and deconstructed through narrative ambiguity and irony.

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A Toast to the Lord has received little critical attention. Yet it is one of the most interesting of Jenkins's novels, especially in terms of its deeply ironic approach to Calvinist ideology and its effects on Scottish character and morality. It is a powerful evocation of the dangers of Calvinist ideology, in which the issue of grace and election is

highly significant. As in so many of his novels, Jenkins's critique of religion is evident, and it is important to note in this context that Jenkins meant *A Toast to the Lord* to be 'a gauntlet to Christianity'.² The religiously confident Agnes Tolmie, whose ultimate strength in the face of devastating tragedy is either based on true faith or on some kind of arrogant stupidity, is one of Jenkins's most fascinating protagonists, and the ambiguity surrounding the question of Agnes's faith continues to baffle the reader even after the novel has reached its conclusion.

Jenkins introduces Agnes Tolmie as a small, unattractive girl: her skin 'was blemished, her hair had dandruff, her legs were thick' (*TTL* 7). Returning to Ardhalow from Glasgow with her fellow college student Dora Plenderleith, Agnes is immediately presented in sharp contrast to her friend. Dora's evident good looks, material well-being, and social graces mark her out as fortunate and privileged, while Agnes's peculiarities of character, her unattractiveness, and her upbringing by a religiously fanatic father make other people, such as Dora, treat her with condescending pity. However, we soon learn that Agnes has a high opinion of herself; she is convinced that she is one of the Calvinist Elect, and the idea of a 'self-given' spiritual significance is reflected in her even as a young girl:

In school, while parsing or drawing maps or working out algebra equations, she'd shiver with delight as her soul tasted the sweetness of knowing the Lord favoured her. That the marks of His favour were still to be shown made them all the sweeter. Her classmates, as they glanced at her, winked to one another and touched their heads with their forefingers, meaning that she was daft. ... They did not know yet she had a superiority over them too great to be named. The time would come, though, when they would see for themselves. (*TTL* 34)

Agnes's belief in her own election determines most of her actions in the novel. Her pursuit of the American sailor Luke Dilworth is a prime example. On first seeing him, she interprets her strong sexual reaction as a sign that the Lord has chosen the young man to be her husband. Agnes's subsequent and dubious means of securing Luke as a husband demonstrate her assurance in the Lord's support and the strong Antinomian influence on her faith. Her notion that she has God's support in wooing Luke further determines how far towards extremes her subsequent actions are pushed.

Agnes faces the difficulty, however, that Luke is not attracted to her but instead shows interest in Ann, Dora Plenderleith's sister. That this is the case significantly relates to Agnes's identification of herself with the Biblical character Leah, which demonstrates a certain level of mental dissociation. The story of Leah and her role as the unwanted wife in the story of Jacob (*Genesis*, chapters 29-30) also runs parallel with Agnes in the context of her relationship with Luke. Leah, 'the most tragic figure in the drama' of Jacob's story,³

conspires with her father to deceive Jacob into marriage by dressing up as her sister Rachel, whom Jacob loves and is really supposed to marry. Just as Jacob prefers Rachel to Leah, Luke prefers Ann to Agnes, and while Rachel is more beautiful than Leah, Ann is much prettier than Agnes. In seeing herself as Leah, Agnes becomes, as it were, two personalities, using this alternative side of herself as an excuse for her actions. This is clearly seen in her reflections prior to her having sex with a drunken American sailor, which then leads to her subsequent rape of Luke: ‘... she was Leah, with the Lord’s invisible hand on her back pushing her forward, towards what she could not yet see clearly, but she knew it must be fulfilment’ (*TTL* 68-69). As the American sailor sordidly deprives her of her virginity, she again thinks of Leah: ‘To help her endure it she thought of Leah having to utter not so much as a sigh lest Jacob should discover she was not Rachel’ (*TTL* 72). Most importantly, Agnes justifies her rape of Luke by feeling ‘like one possessed or under divine goadings’ (*TTL* 76), and on actually trying to make him penetrate her, ‘she must have had *unseen assistance* for she succeeded very quickly’ (*TTL* 77, *italics mine*). The transference of responsibility to heavenly powers demonstrated in these lines clearly establishes Agnes as a person only too willing to sin in the name of God and Calvinist grace.

The character of Agnes’s father, William Tolmie, is also of great consequence to Jenkins’s exploration of Calvinism in the novel. The founder of a small ‘local branch of the Church of Christ the Master’ (*TTL* 8), Tolmie sternly condemns acts of spontaneity and enjoyment, and preaches the strict observance of the Sabbath. Jenkins makes evident Tolmie’s self-righteousness and the stifling impact of his thinking on his family through various narrative perspectives. In Ardhalow, Tolmie and his bigoted version of religious values are clearly seen as tired and out-of-date, as reflected with great irony in the comments of one town councillor when Ardhalow decides to abolish the observance of the Sabbath: ‘The protests of Tolmie and his like were brusquely swept aside. As Councillor McBean put it, “There used to be a time when it was Scotland’s distinction to be backward in religion, but that time’s long past”’ (*TTL* 32). This critical representation of Tolmie is also expressed through his wife Isa. She criticises her husband and the limiting value of his faith severely: ‘What kind of a religion is it that makes you see wickedness in a doll just because it has long hair and eyes that shut?’ (*TTL* 21). Isa’s presence in the novel emphasises the moral folly of Tolmie’s fanaticism, and her outlook remains one of the stronger elements of Jenkins’s critique of Calvinism as adopted by Tolmie and his like.

One of the major impacts of Tolmie’s religious perspective is the way his ideology is transmitted to his daughter. Like her father, Agnes becomes, in Alan Bold’s words, ‘besotted with religion’.⁴ But there is an essential difference between father and daughter.

Despite his assumption that he is not one of the Elect, Tolmie persists in trying to lead what he sees as a life without sin, behaving according to the strictest codes of divine law. On the other hand, Agnes's confidence in her own election makes the concept of sin less important to her when measured against her status as one of God's chosen. Comparable to Robert Wringhim of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), she commits actions which many, and certainly her father, would consider sinful. She tries to blackmail Luke emotionally into becoming her sweetheart and, when this fails, has sex with two men on the same night in order to then use her subsequent pregnancy as a means of forcing Luke into marriage. In this sense, Agnes is obviously similar to Robert Wringhim in his gaining through deceit 'a debased version of the autonomy and freedom which supposedly are his by virtue of being one of God's chosen people'.⁵ Even though Agnes's deception does not directly cause harm to others, Luke Dilworth nevertheless faces the prospect of committing himself for life to a woman he will never be able to love. Moreover, Luke is ultimately murdered by his future father-in-law as an indirect result of Agnes's rape of him and her claim that he is the father of her child. In this way, Luke is a victim of Agnes's 'justified' sins, as to an extent are the other characters whom she misleads. The tragic events that follow, such as Agnes's mother's death, Tolmie's suicide, and even Tommy Springburn's death of exposure on the Glenafiach flat, are all indirectly caused by Agnes's scheming and wicked behaviour. Again, this emphasises William Tolmie's role in the novel. By thus bringing up his daughter to believe in absolute grace, once given, his influence eventually destroys his family and negatively affects the whole town of Ardhalow.

Agnes's Antinomian sense of election is clearly what ultimately governs her actions and sets off their tragic aftermath. Jenkins makes evident what the dangers of Agnes's ideology are. For example, he points out the essential flaws of her faith through Ann Plenderleith, who says that Agnes gets 'rid of responsibility on to the Lord' very easily (*TTL* 22). A similar suggestion is made through Granny Brisbane, who maintains that it is not Agnes's real nature to be good—that Agnes is, in fact, merely 'good' to 'please the Lord' (*TTL* 41). Significantly, Granny suspects the real nature of Agnes's faith and her apparent 'goodness'. She says to Agnes: 'Luke does it [goodness] because it's his nature. I could see you up to mischief if it suited you, Agnes. But not Luke. He'll be taken advantage of, sorry to say' (*TTL* 41). Making Granny one of the more sensible and sympathetic figures in the story, Jenkins uses her to imply the moral pitfalls of Agnes's thinking. Granny realises the essential problems surrounding Agnes's mentality, and she tries to make the young woman accept that it is hopeless for her to woo Luke. Through

Granny, the reader is made more strongly aware of the limitations of and ambivalence surrounding Agnes and her motivations.

Miss Breckinridge, one of Jenkins's recurrent schoolmistress spinsters, is another character whose unsureness about the value of faith sheds particular light on the novel's ultimate ambiguity. Miss Breckinridge is fascinated by Agnes, but is unsure about Agnes's strength in the face of horrible death. The elusive and mysterious nature of Agnes's response to the tragedy is revealed through Miss Breckinridge's thoughts at the funeral of William and Isa Tolmie:

As she listened to the minister's humdrum prayer, ... the headmistress wondered. Was she confronted, in the person of Agnes, with the solution to the whole human predicament, if only she could interpret it? Was this calmness in the face of extreme tribulation the consequence of faith, of ineradicable belief that Christ was with her, and with all people, so that life had a purpose and that purpose was good? Or was it a consummate exhibition of that human failing which would destroy the race, refusal to face up to the dirty truth, and eagerness to be deceived by hope however specious?

Miss Breckinridge could not tell. She hoped for all their sakes Christ was at work, but feared it was deception. The minister's words were absolutely no help. (*TTL* 192)

Miss Breckinridge's questioning can be read as reflecting Jenkins's own doubts about the human tendency to seek solace in religion. Miss Breckinridge's reflections thus emphasise the novel's challenging treatment of religion, while they also point towards the main difficulty in reading the character of Agnes. In fact, Miss Breckinridge reaches the conclusion that it is stupidity that inspires Agnes, where 'God was made the excuse for avoiding responsibility and blame' (*TTL* 220). Yet her subsequent dismissal of Agnes's religious explanations for Tommy Springburn's fate to the schoolchildren as 'all right' despite her own doubts and irritation at Agnes (*TTL* 221), makes the novel end on a paradoxical note. Ultimately, the reader is left baffled as to what is the reality of Agnes's faith. As Glenda Norquay suggests:

... the final serenity she [Agnes] achieves can be seen as a supreme callousness beyond the comprehension of the reader, or it can be seen as genuine 'joy in the Lord' which the mass of humanity cannot share because it lacks her single-minded devotion.⁶

Further in relation to Jenkins's ambivalent presentation of Agnes's religion, it is important to consider briefly the significance of Tommy Springburn, the orphan boy who disappears on the same night as the Tolmie family is hit by tragedy, and whose remains are later found on the Argyll hills. This withdrawn and quiet twelve-year-old emerges as a variation on Jenkins's presentation of social outcasts, his distant demeanour and solitary independence making him especially reminiscent of Tom Curdie of *The Changeling*.

Parallel to Tom Curdie, also, his social isolation ostensibly leads to his tragic fate. At the same time, Tommy Springburn's death is given deeper significance because of narrative presentation of him as a kind of Christ-figure. Ann Plenderleith's belief that Tommy is Christ, come again to test the 'sincerity of our faith ... [and] the quality of our love' (*TTL* 24) introduces this idea, while Agnes's thoughts of him as having a 'faraway look' and a 'refined remote face' (*TTL* 14) has already established him as having an almost otherworldly appearance. The orphanage matron's comments further suggest a sense of otherworldliness, although in a more uncanny way: 'He never talks at all. It's got so bad some of the smaller boys are afraid of him. He sits among them like a ghost' (*TTL* 91).

As Agnes engages more closely with Tommy, his implied spiritual worth is made even more prominent. His position as an outsider has already linked him with Agnes, but when she starts to believe that he is also one of God's chosen, their parallel status is reinforced. Thus Agnes ponders on his seclusion, and other people's reaction to this, as being comparable to her own: 'Perhaps this boy who had no friends and could not settle at school or at the Home, among people that was to say, was too close to the Lord and so must, like her, look different and be despised for it' (*TTL* 53). The idea of Agnes and Tommy as related figures is then reiterated through narrative presentation of the circumstances surrounding Tommy's disappearance and death. In this context also, Tommy's implied spiritual distinction becomes analogous to that of Calum in *The Cone-Gatherers*, as the full significance of Tommy's Christ-like or otherworldly status is seen to relate strongly to the novel's outcome. It seems obvious that Jenkins wanted Agnes's and Tommy's fates to have a bearing on each other. After all, Tommy disappears on the same day as Agnes's mother dies of cancer, Granny Brisbane passes away, Luke Dilworth is murdered by William Tolmie, and Tolmie commits suicide. Surely this rather unlikely and bizarre turn of events is supposed to carry a greater significance than can be seen on the surface? Surely this almost apocalyptic episode conveys significant links between Agnes's partly self-inflicted loss and the orphan boy's gruesome end? The positioning of Tommy's remains is particularly significant in this respect. Comparable to the macabre crucifixional posture of the murdered Calum in *The Cone-Gatherers*, Tommy's skeleton lies in an almost sacrificial position on the 'altar' of the Argyll hills. The discovery of his remains on a hill also carries echoes of the crucifixion as it took place on Calgary Hill, while the fact that Tommy's body has been eaten by crows and foxes adds further to the symbolism of sacrifice established here. The question which remains is whether Tommy has been sacrificed to expiate Agnes's sins; earlier intimations of him as a Christ-like figure seem to reinforce this idea. As sacrifices of innocents occur throughout Jenkins's fiction, Tommy's death can be interpreted as yet another of these. Moreover, Miss Breckinridge's reaction to

the news of his death seems to imply a sense of guilt which could apply to all humanity. She thinks of him as 'her victim' (*TTL* 212) and is strongly upset by the idea that it is her own limited humanity combined with that of other people which caused his death. Miss Breckinridge's reflections thus suggest that Tommy—like Christ himself—has been sacrificed as a result of the essentially sinful nature of humanity.

However, the significance of Tommy's mysterious death is left open-ended. Although Agnes emerges intact and seemingly unperturbed by the tragedy of her parents' and Luke's deaths, the reader can never know for certain what impact the tragedy *really* has on her, since we are never given knowledge of her thoughts and feelings after the tragic happenings. Instead, we have to rely entirely on other characters' perspectives, which in turn are entirely ambivalent as to what is the true reason behind Agnes's stoicism. Thus the significance of Tommy's death becomes another feature of the novel which it is difficult to pin down—does Tommy, in the manner of Christ himself, absolve Agnes of her sins by his death on the hills?

It is clearly Jenkins's use of narrative technique which presents most of these questions to the reader. In her discussion of *A Toast to the Lord* and *A Would-Be Saint*, Glenda Norquay argues that these novels prompt the reader to question 'whether this goodness [Agnes's and Gavin's] does, in fact, exist, or is not simply a sophisticated form of hypocrisy and attention-seeking'.⁷ Norquay suggests that these uncertainties are reinforced by the narrative technique used in both novels:

... in each the reader is denied complete knowledge of the characters so that we too have to contemplate the possibility that we might be victims either of an authorial hoax, or of our own desire to believe that goodness does exist.⁸

It is here that the true depth of the novel's elusive ambiguity and equivocal irony is felt. What is ultimately the truth about Agnes? Is she truly religious—does she find her strength in true communion with God? Or is she just plain stupid, obtuse in her deluded belief that she is among God's chosen? Is Agnes 'the true fanatic who endures by testing the endurance of others'⁹? Or has losing her loved ones thrown her into an insane rejection of reality? There does not seem to be a fixed answer to any of these questions, since the narrative perspective itself wavers between total conviction of Agnes's spiritual worth and an absolute rejection of her as either stupid or mad. The reader may therefore find it practically impossible to come to a fixed conclusion about this fascinating but unsettling heroine.

Any reader familiar with the work of Jenkins would be expected to appreciate the ironic quality of *A Toast to the Lord*, especially in light of the fact that one of Jenkins's chief trademarks as a writer is his use of irony. Also, Jenkins emphasises that *A Toast to*

the Lord is 'overflowing with irony'.¹⁰ It is surprising therefore that Edwin Morgan sees what he calls the lack of 'benefit of irony'¹¹ as the chief reason for his negative opinion of the novel. Similarly, the writer of an anonymous review of the novel seems to have totally overlooked its irony, claiming that there is a 'vast gap between what the novel says it is doing and what it actually does'.¹² Even the deeply ironic resonance of the title escapes this writer's attention, so that he or she sees the conclusion of the novel as demonstrating how Jenkins 'stops everything, closes his eyes and firmly toasts the Lord'.¹³

What these two critics fail to see is the basic factor which actually makes *A Toast to the Lord* work as a novel. As in much of his fiction, Jenkins's use of irony gives this story an underlying tone which suggests that everything is not as it seems on the surface. A relatively straightforward narrative is maintained which is nevertheless deceptively simple. In this way, the reader is fooled into seeing only what there is on the surface. Jenkins's approach to Agnes's fervent belief in the Lord and His absolute approval and support of her actions might, if interpreted in light of what is seen on the surface, seem to mean that Agnes represents true Christian faith, patience and trust in Providence. On the other hand, when viewed in light of the narrative irony present throughout, Agnes's faith becomes questionable and not so straightforward. Ultimately, the irony of Jenkins's approach to her religion gives Agnes's true worth a highly ambiguous quality, and his general portrayal of her carries subtle criticism of religion in general and Calvinism in particular.

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Like *A Toast to the Lord*, *A Would-Be Saint* is an unsettling and enigmatic novel, charting the development of Gavin Hamilton, the 'would-be saint' of the title, from his childhood in Southern Lanarkshire during and after the Great War, his adolescence and youth in the inter-war years, and until he is in his late thirties and working in forestry in Argyll at the end of World War II. *A Would-Be Saint* is one of those novels by Jenkins where the theme of moral pilgrimage is most evident, and the development of Gavin Hamilton is important in relation to Jenkins's exploration of morality and religion in his work. Jenkins has explained that his intentions were to depict Gavin as a good person.¹⁴ The novel's opening passages certainly establish the idea of Gavin as 'good': at eight years old, he takes 'for granted that all people in the world existed for his delight' (*WBS* 3), and it is emphasised that everyone in Auchengillan likes him. At the same time, it is clear that his moral sensibility already sets him apart from other people, as he is described as being 'just a bit too well-mannered' (*WBS* 6). As the story progresses, this idea is intensified. Thus the sixteen-year-old Gavin already has definite ideas about how the Christian doctrine of forgiveness and humility should be applied in this world:

It seemed to him that in any dispute in which both sides thought they were in the right, honour lay with the one that yielded, not out of fear or

weakness but out of a desire to avoid hatred and the violence it produced. That side must, he was sure, prevail in the end. (*WBS* 47)

Gavin remains consistently faithful to this principle; he allows his vindictive and bitter grandmother to victimise him after his mother dies, giving up his education as a result, he never reacts to the brutality he suffers from adversaries on the football pitch and eventually gives up football because of the violence it provokes, he refuses to take part in the war against Germany, and he always returns other people's spite with kindness. In this way, he demonstrates the kind of humility and virtue which he feels are lacking in his society. Gavin's moral pilgrimage accordingly consists of trying to achieve an absolute of goodness that could prove inspirational to other people.

Gavin's charity, though acknowledged and praised, nevertheless makes the people in his community feel uncomfortable in his presence. This, Jenkins suggests, is because they are confronted with their own moral frailties when set against Gavin's goodness:

It was noticed how, though Gavin was very friendly and never failed to stop you in the street and ask with undeniable sincerity how you and your family were, you always felt awkward talking to him, whereas when you were talking to people who wouldn't give a damn if you dropped dead at their feet or if your wife had run off with the insurance man, you didn't feel awkward at all. Some said it was because Gavin, without ever saying a word that could be called preaching, made you feel that there were lots of good deeds you should have done and lots of bad deeds you shouldn't. He was, alas, the genuine article. He was the last person to talk to if you wanted to feel satisfied with yourself. (*WBS* 103)

Comparable with Donald Grant and Isobel Kinross of *So Gaily Sings the Lark*, and anticipating George Darroch of *The Awakening of George Darroch*, Gavin's unconventional behaviour and personality cause uneasiness and suspicion among the people who know him. In all novels, and especially in *A Would-Be Saint*, it is implied that when normal, fallible people are confronted with genuine virtue, their uneasiness is simply caused by the fact that they do not want to be reminded of their own moral inadequacy. On encountering true goodness, we are forced to face our own failure, not always a pleasing experience. Only if there is an absolute to measure our weaknesses against can we evaluate them. Jenkins's creation of characters such as Gavin may therefore be meant as a wake-up call to humanity, an encouragement to snap out of what Jenkins terms moral and spiritual laziness.¹⁵

In the religious context, Gavin is comparable to that other, much earlier exemplar of goodness, who was treated with suspicion by many and ended his life on the cross. Gavin is obviously presented as a Christ-figure: he even makes the comparison himself, thinking that he has taken 'upon himself the responsibilities of Christ' (*WBS* 173). His self-denial and isolation, then, are his way of making amends for the sins of humanity. As Manfred

Malzahn comments: 'The rôle Gavin Hamilton has cast for himself is that of a redeemer, a Christ-figure who atones for the failures of his fellow-humans in a humble and meek fashion'.¹⁶ In this context, the scepticism and suspicion shown by other characters to Gavin and his motives are made analogous with what would be the likely reaction of people should Christ appear in the modern world. Jenkins has commented on this issue: 'Christ would be a nasty character nowadays, a damn nuisance. Goodness – people do not like to meet it – they are sceptical, jealous, they mistrust'.¹⁷ *A Would-Be Saint* explores this idea in presenting Gavin as the latter-day Christ whose meek and forgiving nature provokes contradictory responses among his acquaintances. Further, the implication at the end of the novel that Gavin may possibly walk into the hills to his death both reflects back on the novel's title—emphasising the possibility of sainthood—and reinforces Gavin's role as Christ. Evidently, giving up his life would be Gavin's ultimate sacrifice in the name of atonement.

Despite his almost otherworldly status, Gavin is still granted a degree of normality up till Part 3 of the novel. His involvement in football means that Gavin is admired as a hero in Auchengillan, but when he decides to give it up, this tie with his community and the material world is severed. In the last part of the novel, Gavin has retreated fully into isolation. He has now taken on the role of hermit: he lives and works alone, has given away all his material possessions, makes his own clothes, and has grown a beard. The novel's final suggestion seems to be that Gavin represents an ideal of spiritual grace that is normally unattainable in the modern world. This is at least the contention of Donald McMillan, one of Gavin's co-workers. Formerly sceptical of Gavin's motivations, and previously passionate about the importance of human love and involvement, McMillan now believes Gavin has attained spiritual significance parallel to Christ's. In McMillan's view, Gavin's self-denying isolation signifies freedom from the shared fallibility of humanity while also bringing redemption to ordinary people:

Gavin was blossoms, sunshine, and hope.

He [McMillan] was sure that his companions, so contemptuous of religion, felt the same way. Thinking about Gavin gave them faith. They were prisoners, he was still free. Finding the burden too heavy or too shameful they had long ago put down their idealistic protest against the war. Gavin still carried his.

Like me, thought McMillan, they lie awake at night, despising themselves for adding to the world's falseness and hypocrisy. Then they remember Gavin and feel instantly absolved. (WBS 212)

Thus Gavin 'has moved so far beyond the experiences of the others, that he has become for them a symbol of all that they could not achieve', as Norquay's suggests.¹⁸ It is moreover suggested that Gavin is now in a state of grace, since the atheistic McMillan imagines that

if God does exist, 'He must be here, in Gavin Hamilton's blue eyes and patched muddy coat' (*WBS* 215).

Nevertheless, there is underlying ambiguity in these last passages. The way in which Jenkins presents McMillan's thoughts casts some doubt on the authenticity of McMillan's opinion:

They [the forestry workers] did not envy Gavin. They would never have changed places with him. They would have argued that by accepting the world with all its imperfections they were acting more sanely and compassionately than he. [...]

Yet their eagerness to speak to him or just to stand in his presence put a beauty into their faces that had not been there before.

Or so at any rate it seemed to McMillan. (*WBS* 214, italics mine)

Through specifically signifying that this view of events is specific to McMillan, Jenkins highlights the subjectivity of interpretation. McMillan may simply see beauty in the other men's faces because *he* thinks Gavin has undergone some kind of spiritual transformation. The beauty McMillan observes may merely be a projection of his own state of mind, exalted by the belief that Gavin brings redemption to an otherwise fallen world. At the same time, the possibility that McMillan is reading the situation correctly is nevertheless present. In this way, Jenkins's narrative underpins the elusiveness and ambivalence of Gavin's spiritual and moral significance.

This elusiveness is sustained to the novel's end. The ambiguity surrounding the fate and actions of Gavin manifests once more Jenkins's fondness of leaving his novels open-ended and his readers in confusion over what to really make of events. The last time we are allowed insight into Gavin's thoughts is when he contemplates whether to walk into the snowy hills never to return, and thus sacrifice his life in a symbolic atonement for the evils of humanity. The narrative reveals that McMillan is aware of Gavin's intention, with the novel's final chapter describing McMillan's fear that Gavin has chosen this cold winter's night for his 'final gesture of renunciation or expiation' (*WBS* 219), and McMillan's reaction on finding that Gavin has instead returned from the hill and is safe. McMillan's feelings at this discovery are a strange mixture of relief and disappointment. While his thoughts display a hankering after spiritual atonement in the form of Gavin's sacrifice, they are also open to the interpretation that Gavin has now stepped down from his pedestal of prospective sainthood and abandoned his 'superior' moral stance:

For a few seconds he felt disappointed, let down, betrayed. The intolerable burden of conscience, which he was so sick of carrying, must still be carried. Gavin Hamilton's sacrifice, he had foolishly imagined, would have lifted it off him once and for all.

Then, come to his senses, he felt great relief.

He would have to go and tell McAndrew that Gavin was safe. He would say nothing about Gavin's having weakened and given in like everybody else, he would just say that he was safe, thank God. (*WBS* 229)

Malzahn's interpretation of the novel's conclusion takes for granted McMillan's conjecture that Gavin has 'weakened': 'Hamilton does not die the lonely death of a Saint on a snowy hill, but ends up descending nearer to those fellow-beings from whom he had long climbed away in his search for perfection'.¹⁹ How can Malzahn be sure, though, that this is the case? Is it not possible that Gavin has merely deferred his saintly gesture? Apart from McMillan's thoughts—unreliable and restricted through being a biased interpretation of events—there is nothing to suggest that Gavin has 'given in'. Yet again, therefore, Jenkins leaves his readers to conjecture what is the outcome of the story, and we are 'left in ignorance as to whether Gavin will ever become a "saint" and martyr'.²⁰ Once more Jenkins has created a character whose extremely unusual personality and actions defy categorisation, and whose real moral and spiritual significance is ultimately called into question.

Significantly, Gavin's movement towards becoming a recluse means that he also gradually moves beyond other characters' and the reader's understanding. His goodness becomes incomprehensible and ultimately entirely ambiguous. Jenkins realises this quality of his novel, describing it in terms of things turning out otherwise than planned: 'Gavin Hamilton is an attempt to portray a good person, but things go wrong. The only solution is an escape into silence but that in itself is a defeat'.²¹ The idea of escaping 'into silence' is applicable both to Gavin's retreat into isolation and to the way Jenkins manages the narrative perspective. Thus we slowly lose sight of Gavin as Jenkins reduces narrative access to his protagonist. Eventually, most of the narrative focus rests on Gavin's co-workers and neighbours in Argyll. The reader is thereby forced to rely mostly on the opinion of side-line spectators when making an assessment of Gavin's actions. This contributes significantly to the overall ambiguity surrounding Gavin's character, since other people either 'feel sympathy for his position or ... think he's crazy', as Donald McMillan comments (*WBS* 210). Similar to the ambiguous presentation of Agnes in *A Toast to the Lord*, the narrative perspective vacillates between the belief that Gavin has really achieved spiritual fullness, on one hand, and the opinion that he is mad, his behaviour simply caused by a troubled and difficult childhood, and by his over-sensitive nature and unrealistically high expectations of his fellow-humans, on the other. Eventually, as Norquay notes, both perspectives 'are given a certain amount of credibility but as readers we are never allowed to settle totally for one or the other'.²²

There are other ambiguities in the overall presentation of Gavin's development, presented through both Gavin's perspective and that of other characters. It is frequently

implied that a great part of the reason behind Gavin's adherence to extremes of goodness and charity may simply be his pride. Julia Bannatyne loves Gavin and sees his goodness as 'irresponsible and ruinous' (*WBS* 91) but questions the real motivations behind his actions:

He wanted to remain poor and humble; yet he struck her as being dangerously ambitious in a spiritual sense. He acted as if the goodwill of everyone was important to him; yet he could be so self-sufficient that she herself often felt excluded. He did good deeds; but she sometimes wondered if he did them out of pure compassion and not out of a wish to show up the selfishness of others, including herself. (*WBS* 62)

Gavin's own thoughts indicate further his ambivalent motives:

Everybody else [except his grandmother] thought he was too meek, and so he was; but he was aware often of a fierce pride locked in him. If he let it break loose he would defy not only this hard-faced, spiteful, stupid, old woman [his grandmother], but the whole world even if it meant destroying himself. (*WBS* 52)

Perhaps Gavin's show of humility and kindness is, in a paradoxical way, a manifestation of his pride. In being meek and charitable, he may simply be trying to prove himself morally superior to the rest of fallible humanity. And is there not a certain amount of defiance in his actions, which even leads to self-destruction in the sense that he is eventually cut off from the sense of human community and kinship that he initially sees as the most valuable of all? Even in the novel's last passages it is suggested through one of his co-workers that pride is at the root of Gavin's behaviour: "I've often wondered," said McNaughton, "if it isn't a matter of pride with Gavin. On the surface he seems so meek, but beneath he's always struck me as having a terrific pride" (*WBS* 211). It is possible therefore that Gavin's goodness is not altogether spontaneous but practised merely to illustrate that he can rise above the rest of humanity and defy the values of a world degraded by materialism and spiritual disillusionment.

There also seems something fundamentally wrong with Gavin's moral reasoning as regards his 'policy of not being beholden' during the war (*WBS* 152). By not accepting favours from other people, he will cleanse himself of 'responsibility for all the evils of the war and so ... [acquire] the right to pity not only those who had suffered from them but also those who had perpetrated them' (*WBS* 147). Yes, Gavin's philosophy emphasises what McMillan refers to as 'the universal infection' (*WBS* 172), that is, the essential fallibility of humanity and man's propensity towards evil. Moreover, it signifies that even if we are not actively fighting the war ourselves, we are still not innocent of the brutalities and injustices it causes, especially when we expect to be protected by soldiers who have, in turn, killed innocent civilians on the enemy's side. Nevertheless, Gavin's reasoning has a strong element of arrogant self-righteousness and rigidity that undermines his apparent charity. After all, he cannot even leave children out of his moral calculations:

They [children] were not to blame, yet they were not innocent.

They were to be pitied. But who had a right to pity them? Not ministers or priests who told them that Christ's commands to love their enemies did not apply. Not politicians who promised them a guilt-free future when the slaughter was over. Not airmen who thought that the killing or maiming of children was a risk that could be honourably taken. Not soldiers who killed other soldiers who were the fathers of children. Not even their own parents who accepted as a legitimate consequence of war the deaths of other parents' children.

And who had a right to pity those ministers, politicians, airmen, soldiers, and parents?

Only someone completely uninvolved. (WBS 194)

When a cake is left in Gavin's house by the neighbours' children, we see it as representing some of those things most valuable in life: the innocence and spontaneity of children, neighbourly friendliness, and a sense of community. For Gavin, however, it represents a choice. By eating the cake, he would abandon his stance of non-involvement and thereby forfeit the right to pity those tainted by the evils of war. He would become part of humanity again, and thereby share its fallibility. By choosing the opposite instead and throwing out the cake, he opts for isolation, or what he believes will bring him towards moral purity. The reader certainly finds it hard to sympathise with this choice, since Gavin is actually rejecting all those values that we see as being symbolised by the cake. We are therefore inclined to view him as an arrogant, self-righteous fanatic, who considers his own (apparent) moral worth more important than showing respect to the kindness of neighbours. In any case, we can at least concede that Gavin has, in Malzahn's words, taken his moral standards to such extremes that they appear 'inhuman in practice'.²³

A Would-Be Saint encapsulates many of the central moral concerns of Jenkins's fiction. It deals with the problematics of individual goodness and the ambiguous nature of moral purity, and it highlights the discrepancy between the values of modern society and the essentials of Christianity. Its highly ambiguous quality is, perhaps, reflected in critical treatments of the work, which are mostly, but not entirely, positive. Norquay suggests that it is Jenkins's 'most enigmatic novel'²⁴ and his 'most serious examination of the impossibility of achieving pure good within a circumstantial reality'.²⁵ For Roderick Watson, it is 'an understated study of the ambiguities of unforced goodness' where Jenkins's 'predominantly ethical imagination finds one of its best expressions',²⁶ while Douglas Gifford sees it as one of Jenkins's most important novels.²⁷ However, given the unusual eccentricities of the novel's hero and the unsettling nature of his actions, it is not surprising to find some negative commentary on this book. Thus Anne Stevenson comments: 'I have never read a novel whose hero I disliked—and disbelieved in—so entirely'.²⁸ Stevenson's dislike of Gavin is understandable, since he does in many ways emerge as an unpleasant character, his cool, detached moral calculations taking precedence

over human love and involvement, or, as Stevenson herself notes: 'the right to pity replaces the need to love'.²⁹ But many of Jenkins's characters do not conform with our ideas of normality, simply because the last thing Jenkins wants is to make us feel comfortable about ourselves. Or, as Binding argues: 'Jenkins isn't interested ... in the creation of engaging characters with whom readers can pleasantly identify, thereby often conferring flattering sophistications upon themselves'.³⁰ In this respect, Gavin Hamilton is especially comparable to the hero of *Just Duffy*, discussed later in this chapter. Both are overwhelmingly and intensely aware of the moral hypocrisy of humanity and of the evils being perpetrated every day in the name of morality. As with Duffy, this awareness and his efforts to be an example of moral purity set Gavin apart from others, and comparable to Duffy also, things go amiss somewhere along the road of his self-conscious efforts at goodness.

Stevenson further argues that *A Would-Be Saint* is marked by shallow characterization and 'superficial quickness of pace', and that the irony of Gavin's position ... totally escapes Mr Jenkins'.³¹ I would however argue that she is quite mistaken in this assertion. Many minor characters are drawn with depth and understanding, most notably Julia Bannatyne, aware that her materialism means that she would never 'grow in humanity' as Gavin might (*WBS* 87), and Donald McMillan, whose change from cheerful common sense to self-reproach and despair at humanity seems inspired by Gavin's self-denying isolation from society. And Jenkins's portrayal of Gavin's childhood and adolescence, which includes suggesting the negative effects of Gavin's upbringing by an emotionally repressed mother and, later, by a bitter and vindictive grandmother, is wholly convincing. Gavin's move towards incomprehensible 'goodness' during Part 3 then gradually causes us to withdraw our empathy, as this 'goodness' becomes increasingly unrealistic, ambivalent and enigmatic, and his way of not being beholden begins to smack of arrogance, self-righteousness, and even fanaticism. It is in this respect, moreover, that the real irony of the novel becomes evident. By pushing Gavin towards such extremes, Jenkins emphasises the irony inherent in his protagonist's moral position: if goodness consists of withdrawing from human company and denying every possible favour offered by your fellow humans, how can it apply in a world where kinship and interdependence are necessary for survival? And how is it possible at all to expect people to show kindness to one another, if such kindness is liable to be contaminated by whatever moral wrong or hypocrisy they may be guilty of, and thus made unacceptable to those who are morally 'pure'? Jenkins is certainly not unaware of the irony of Gavin's position; indeed, his method of presenting Gavin's 'goodness' is what establishes this irony.

Although Robin Jenkins's *Guests of War* is a historical novel in the sense that it is based on the evacuations during World War II, it is also based on an event that happened within Jenkins's lifetime and in which Jenkins was personally involved when, as a school teacher, he accompanied evacuee families from Glasgow to Moffatt. *The Awakening of George Darroch*, on the other hand, is Jenkins's only novel to date³² that has as its basis a historical event that took place before Jenkins's own time. The Great Disruption of 1843 was an event at which one third of Scottish ministers seceded from the Established Church in protest at state interference in church matters, and thereafter formed the Free Church of Scotland. By focusing his novel on the Great Disruption, Jenkins's fascination with Scottish religious history is made more explicit than ever, though it is shown throughout in his novels' consistent allusion to events such as the birth of Christianity in Scotland (*The Missionaries*, *A Love of Innocence*), the Reformation (*The Tiger of Gold*) and the Covenanting wars (*The Thistle and the Grail*, *Guests of War*, *The Expatriates*). Jenkins has here chosen as subject matter an event that 'divided communities and families in a kind of civil war without weapons',³³ and which involved great courage and determination on the part of the seceding ministers, since leaving the Established Church meant that their families' financial security was placed at risk. By focusing his narrative on the struggling conscience of one of those ministers, George Darroch, Jenkins can explore the conflicts arising from the contradictory demands of material circumstance on one hand, and religious dedication on the other. Darroch earns a small yearly stipend that barely suffices to support his large family, and the decision whether or not to leave the Established Church is therefore all the more problematic for him, especially with his wife pregnant for the fifteenth time and his eldest son about to enter university. Within this context, Darroch's personal development, his spiritual 'awakening', and Jenkins's ambiguous presentation of its true validity, through the perspectives of Darroch and other characters, manifest yet again Jenkins's interest in questions of social and ideological conformity, moral integrity, spiritual transformation, and the subjectivity of interpretation. *The Awakening of George Darroch* is very much focused on the theme of moral pilgrimage, and is, in Norquay's words, 'a culmination of ... [Jenkins's] concern with human idealism in conjunction with human self-interest'.³⁴

George Darroch is presented as an idealistic, awkward, and introspective man. At the same time, his personality is generally characterised by paradoxical impulses and appearances. He is racked by feelings of religious and moral inadequacy, yet is early shown to think that he has a 'reservoir of spiritual power' locked in him (*AGD* 7); in his behaviour he appears to have humility, piety and charity, yet much of his thoughts are shown to be lecherous and conceited; his outward demeanour projects an image of

simplicity and innocence, yet he is shown at times to be manipulative and deceitful; and the novel's other characters are generally divided in their opinion of him, seeing him either as an immature simpleton, as a genuine specimen of the charitable and humble Christian, or as a conceited and false humbug. Darroch's paradoxical and ambiguous personality recalls many other characters in Jenkins's fiction, and the complexities of his outlook correspond with several types from earlier novels. Comparable to Charlie Forbes of *The Changeling*, for example, it is implied that Darroch's quixotic championing of equality, tolerance and justice is derived from his desire to show off his superior Christian forbearance, as indicated when Darroch's brother-in-law, Robert Drummond, on witnessing one of Darroch's extravagant displays of goodwill and piety, views it as 'humbug masquerading as humility' (AGD 48). Furthermore, there are elements of characters like Angus McArthur (*A Love of Innocence*), Michael Eking (*The Holy Tree*) and Mungo Niven (*A Very Scotch Affair*) in Darroch's calculated lechery, self-importance, and self-glorification, and definite similarities between Darroch's spiritual assurance—especially following his 'awakening'—and that of Agnes Tolmie and Gavin Hamilton. Like Abdul Wahab of *Dust on the Paw*, Darroch is not always sure of his own motivations and aims, his timidity and indecisiveness repeatedly causing him to vacillate between selfless idealism and calculated self-interest. Yet he is at times shown to be painfully aware of his moral frailties, his self-questioning echoing the intense self-interrogation seen in characters like Andrew Rutherford (*The Thistle and the Grail*) and Bell McShelvie (*Guests of War*). It could be argued therefore that Darroch encapsulates some of the most recurrent types of characters in Jenkins's fiction, to the extent, even, that he could be read as an 'archetypal' Jenkins protagonist. In this sense, although the narrative's historical frame represents an innovative movement in Jenkins's writing, there is little that is effectively new in his portrayal of Darroch: there is the same guilt, self-flagellation, suspect idealism, self-deceit, dubious piety, conceit, and guile.

It is, however, the contention of some critics that *The Awakening of George Darroch* is among the more important later developments in Jenkins's *oeuvre*. Indeed, when the novel came out in 1985, the *Glasgow Herald* serialised it and printed various articles on the subject of the novel, its historical background, and Jenkins's literary achievement.³⁵ Yet the praise accorded the novel has mainly referred to its historical frame of reference. Philip Howard commends Jenkins for bringing to life 'a world that was both cold and warm, passionate and rigorous',³⁶ while Douglas Dunn, though criticising Jenkins's treatment of sex in the novel,³⁷ praises Jenkins for his skill at making interesting the otherwise 'stuffy, dry, and distant' politics of the Church in the 1840s.³⁸

Furthermore, Glenda Norquay argues that the novel is important in giving the theme of individual development a wider, national dimension:

The Awakening of George Darroch represents an acknowledgement of those factors which construct for Jenkins's characters the frequently contradictory and potentially destructive codes by which they operate, but extends the significance of that tension into a political analysis of a whole country's history.³⁹

Indeed, several aspects of the narrative are important to the picture given of Scotland in Jenkins's fiction. Comparable to *Fergus Lamont*, for instance, *The Awakening of George Darroch* suggests that there is a deep-set division at the heart of the Scottish nation. On one level, the novel refers to political and ideological disunity as having negatively affected Scotland's material and spiritual state, as seen in the reflections of James Darroch after his father has walked out of the General Assembly with the dissenting leaders:

James felt like screaming that they were all wrong; what they had seen was a demonstration of the disastrous divisiveness of the Scottish nation, which had kept it materially and spiritually impoverished in the past and was still doing so today. (AGD 265)

On another level, *The Awakening of George Darroch* continues Jenkins's social interrogation in portraying a society that is severely divided by class and material wealth. The hierarchy of this society is shown, for example, in Jenkins's description of how the pews in Darroch's church are occupied every Sunday, with people of substance occupying the pews at the front, while the lowliest have to stand at the back: 'Places empty because the usual occupants were absent could not be taken by persons of inferior grade' (AGD 120). As in *The Cone-Gatherers*, *Guests of War*, and *Fergus Lamont*, Scottish society is seen as essentially fragmented, its privileged and dispossessed classes unable to comprehend one another, and the wide gap between social levels maintained by those who perceive social equality as a threat to their privileged status. It is no coincidence that Jeremy Taylor is perceived by many of the well-to-do characters as dangerous to society because of his preaching radical socialism. In reality, Taylor is only perceived as dangerous because the ideology he preaches reveals just how unfair is the system on which his attackers' material advantage is based.

What critics have failed to note is that Jenkins's innovative deployment of history is accompanied by another narrative feature alien to his literary methods. This is the epistolary form, as the frequent letters of Annabel Wedderburn to her sister take up an appreciable part of the narrative (AGD 140-146, 187-191, 216-220, 233-238).⁴⁰ Through these letters, Jenkins introduces a narrative perspective that exists outside the confines of the Darroch family and household (until Annabel marries Henry Darroch), and which provides us with an alternative interpretation of events. Thus Annabel, for instance, states

that Darroch is really 'a little mountebank' (*AGD* 238), and her exclamations over the happenings at the Darroch household recurrently bring into the story an element of comic absurdity. But even though this epistolary element adds to the novel's innovative quality, I would argue that it detracts from the story's historical authenticity. It is the early 1840s, and yet Annabel is writing *very* explicitly about sex and sexuality. It is highly questionable whether Annabel's sexual and emotional openness, even to her sister, is entirely believable for a woman of her era. Douglas Gifford expresses his doubts about this aspect of the novel:

The letters of Annabelle [*sic*] Wedderburn ... are unconvincingly frank in matters sensual and personal. [...] Even more unconvincing is the giggling, but liberated *style* of her letters, which would be questioned, I think, even in the period of [D. H.] Lawrence.⁴¹

Arguably, Jenkins is unwittingly and anachronistically letting a predominantly modern perspective intrude on an otherwise convincing historical frame.

In terms of the issues of morality and self-discovery, I would argue that the most important aspect of *The Awakening of George Darroch* is Jenkins's presentation of Darroch's 'awakening' and its aftermath. Echoing the earlier portrayals of Agnes Tolmie and Gavin Hamilton, this is presented in highly ambiguous terms, since the narrative reveals various different and contradictory perspectives on the protagonist's subsequent demeanour and actions. Through Darroch himself, we learn that he receives a message from God. Somewhat ironically, this takes place moments after Darroch, having buried his wife the same day, visits Eleanor Jarvie, his minister friend's widow, secretly hoping to have sex with her, but only to have her reject his impulsive proposal of marriage. His subsequent thoughts—a mixture of self-accusation, self-indulgence, prayer, and opportunist plans—are interrupted by a voice:

It was then that he heard clearly for the first time the still small voice in the depths of his mind. It was not the voice of conscience warning him against self-deception. It was the voice of God, with a message.

It told him that he had been picked to turn the Kirk of Scotland away from arid theology towards compassionate and responsible involvement with those many members of society, men, women, and children, degraded by poverty and hitherto ignored by the Kirk. (*AGD* 175)

The incident is a turning point for Darroch. He is now certain of his status as one of the Elect, counting himself among those who are 'engaged in Christ's business' (*AGD* 175). Formerly awkward, indecisive, and 'frequently in a confusion of morality, with one scruple scurrying at the heels of another' (*AGD* 177), Darroch now appears confident, assertive, and morally at ease. His proclamations of Christian charity and piety are delivered with an air of dedication and religious conviction that many other characters find disconcerting. It is suggested that Darroch has experienced a spiritual transformation that has given him the

boldness necessary to speak out plainly on the duty of the Church to concern itself with social justice. Because Darroch's views of social equality are shown to clash with the social outlook of his more conservative peers, it seems that his transformation represents a challenge to conventional ideas of religion and politics and thereby a break from social conformity.

The reader is thus encouraged to view the change that has taken place in Darroch in a positive light. Many aspects of his new approach are admirable: he speaks out for social equality and is the only character in the novel to understand and accept, even defend, the socialist ideology of Jeremiah Taylor; he urges his family to show tolerance, forgiveness and charity; he is critical of his colleagues' 'stilted, antiquated, and lifeless' religion (*AGD* 225) and understands that, because of this, the proposed new Free Church is in danger of becoming even more staunchly intolerant of spontaneity, enjoyment, and extravagance than is the Established Church; and he challenges his peers by openly addressing the necessity of greater social involvement on the church's behalf, stressing that this is not conceivable if ministers keep 'concentrating too much on the Word and losing sight of the Substance' (*AGD* 228). Darroch is aware that it is imperative for the church to advocate social justice, in the name of equality but also in order to keep the labouring masses from turning atheist in lieu with the radical socialist factions already being formed. In this sense, Darroch is presented both as holding ideals for a just society and as a visionary who foresees the negative effects of socialism on the church's following. Only through challenging the existing ideology can he effect change. Being familiar with the spiritual disillusionment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and with the rise of socialism and its failure in the twentieth century, the contemporary reader can identify with and admire Darroch's ideals even if history has proved them futile. This means that the religious, social, and historical perspective of the novel encourages us to regard Darroch's new and uncompromising confidence with approval.

Simultaneously, the validity and value of Darroch's new assurance are called into question through the perspectives of various other characters. These vacillate between the view that Darroch is deluded, hypocritical, and sly, and the possibility that his actions and bearing originate from a true spiritual source. Thus his colleagues cannot come to a definite conclusion about his confident moralising on behalf of the rights of coal-miners: 'They could not make up their minds whether they were dealing with a booby or with someone who, through Christ's favour, knew things that they, for all their erudition, never would' (*AGD* 242). In a similar vein, contradictory interpretations are presented through Darroch's two adolescent sons. On the one hand, James views his father's new self-confidence as confirmation that he 'not only had learned the value of hypocrisy but also

had become adept at practising it' (*AGD* 196). On the other hand, Arthur Darroch's thoughts as his father walks into the General Assembly suggest that there is an almost otherworldly, even 'spiritual', air about Darroch: 'his father looked strangely distinctive, not only because of his bright hair and beautiful poet's face but because of something else hard to name [...] something new, something Arthur had never seen before' (*AGD* 260). There is a definite elusiveness here, though, as the idea of 'something' makes ambiguous even Arthur's view of his father; perhaps, Darroch looks 'strangely distinctive' merely because his self-given, but false, sense of grace is projected as a sign of true spirituality.

Other aspects of the narrative work to undermine the moral value of Darroch's transformation. For instance, immediately after returning home from his 'communion' with God, Darroch callously dismisses the housekeeper, Mrs Barnes, whom he had promised his dying wife to take as his new wife. Although he is guilty of breaking his promise to both Margaret and Mrs Barnes, Darroch believes that he is justified in his actions, since he is now on a crusade 'to bring warmth of heart into the Kirk' (*AGD* 195) and must consider marrying some influential lady to help him further his cause. Indeed, Darroch's thoughts and behaviour now smack of religious arrogance and self-righteousness. He believes he is one of the Elect, and is therefore justified in using his talent 'for beating the hypocritical world at its own game' and to 'no longer wear his soul on his sleeve' (*AGD* 176). His visit to Mrs Cooper, who is in jail for murdering her own daughter, emphasises the extremes of his spiritual arrogance: 'She was weeping. She put out her hand and he took it in his. He believed that for those two long minutes his hand was God's. He wept too, and his tears were God's' (*AGD* 185). In the chapters that follow, we cannot help but suspect that Darroch enjoys showing off his spiritual superiority. In Annabel Wedderburn's letter, he is shown to demonstrate unbearable piety, expecting his young children to show charity and act up to standards that, as Annabel comments, 'grey-bearded leaders of the Church fall short of' (*AGD* 189), and rebuking his brother for taking the family for a drive on the day of Margaret Darroch's funeral. Darroch may be a visionary and criticise the rigid theology of his peers, but here he is shown to practice the same rigidity towards his own family. His spiritual self-aggrandisement is made abundantly clear as the last glimpse given of his thoughts shows him lying in 'a state of delicious suspension' (*AGD* 244) when thinking of the forthcoming General Assembly. This implies that Darroch enjoys the prospect of being at the centre of a momentous historical event, and finds pleasure in there having the chance to prove his moral superiority once and for all.

The value of Darroch's ultimate move is presented in ambivalent terms. Is he the first of the unknown ministers to rise and leave the church because he is genuinely acting

in the name of Christian principle, or is this just the culmination of his ambition to show himself as morally and spiritually superior? James Darroch certainly thinks the latter: 'He knew what had happened: given the best opportunity of his life to show off, his father had not been able to resist it. For the sake of a minute's vanity he had sentenced his family to years of hardship' (*AGD* 264). Nevertheless, we are told of the remarks of passers-by which indicate that Darroch and the seceding ministers have made a noble sacrifice 'for religion's sake' (*AGD* 265). An air of uncertainty in our reading of Darroch is therefore sustained to the end. Norquay describes this ambivalence in Jenkins's portrayal of Darroch:

Our reading of Darroch's character oscillates between seeing in him an admirable refusal to compromise and seeing an overweening arrogance and self-aggrandisement. ... Jenkins prevents the reader from settling for any one account or understanding of Darroch's motivation. The novel forces us constantly to re-evaluate not only characters and situations, but also whole systems of belief.⁴²

This feature of *The Awakening of George Darroch* is in line with the strong tendency of Jenkins's fiction, especially visible in the last period of his writing, to present main characters as morally ambiguous and as ultimately beyond other characters' as well as the reader's comprehension. Like Agnes Tolmie in *A Toast to the Lord* and Gavin Hamilton in *A Would-Be Saint*, George Darroch remains an enigma in the end, his moral and spiritual worth severely questioned but nevertheless not entirely repudiated. Comparable also to Agnes and Gavin, narrative access has been removed from Darroch in the novel's final chapters, so that at the climactic General Assembly, we have no way of knowing what is really going on in his mind. Thus the true motivation behind his decision is ultimately kept shrouded in mystery. As with Gavin and Agnes, we have to ask ourselves whether Darroch's actions are really derived from his spiritual and moral worth, or if they are not simply manifestation of his vain and self-glorifying nature.

*

*Just Duffy*⁴³ both links with and breaks from the previous novels discussed in this chapter. While the novel portrays extremes of 'moral' behaviour in the character of Duffy, the narrative focus is nevertheless *not* removed from Duffy in the final chapters. Instead, we are shown his reactions and feelings on discovering the moral wrong of his actions. As opposed to the elusive and ambiguous value of Agnes Tolmie, Gavin Hamilton, and George Darroch, the moral folly inherent in Duffy's philosophy and actions is eventually made abundantly clear. *Just Duffy*, described by Horst Prillinger as 'an exploration of moral standards',⁴⁴ is a disturbing portrayal of a morally aware teenager determined to show up the social and moral hypocrisy in his community, but whose crusade against a corrupt society ultimately leaves him infected by the evil he wants to destroy. *Just Duffy*

offers no fixed solutions to the problems it raises, nor any moral certainty to the reader, but, despite being at times somewhat unconvincing in its portrayal of Duffy and his moral and social fixations, it is a startling example of Jenkins's ability to create unusual, 'extreme' characters and through them manipulate our perceptions and evaluations of concepts like right and wrong, good and evil, idealism and fanaticism. Even if we are left puzzled as to what to make of the novel's conclusion, it forces us to consider timeless and universal moral issues such as those involved in politics and international warfare.

Duffy has been classified by Norquay as 'an ambiguous figure who could be either saint or fool',⁴⁵ by Beth Dickson as 'the holy fool *manque*, innocent but dangerously idealistic'⁴⁶ and by Colin Milton as 'an emotional outsider'.⁴⁷ While other characters see Duffy as a simpleton, he is more intelligent than they realise, although the plot eventually reveals that his intelligence is quite misguided and dangerous. Duffy's naïve idealism and his obsession with war and its false moralities prompt him to wage a private war against the selfishness, hypocrisy, and immorality he sees in his community. Thus we are early introduced to Duffy's moral reasoning:

Duffy was well aware that though most human beings were capable of atrocities very few committed them and the great majority condemned them utterly: except of course if they were done to win a war. No one cared how many babies or cats were burned to death in Hiroshima or Dresden. (*JD* 11)

Having asked his history teacher Flockhart 'what gave nations the right to declare war and thereafter claim that the killing of their enemies was permissible and legal' (*JD* 2), his teacher had simply answered that most nations would argue that God gave them that right. Duffy concedes that if he ever declared war himself, he too would use God as an excuse, but 'with more right, for his purpose would be to save not to destroy' (*JD* 2). Flockhart's ironic and radical answers to Duffy's questions no doubt contribute to Duffy's obsession with war and morality, and Duffy's subsequent actions are frequently explained and justified by opinions expressed by Flockhart in the classroom. Jenkins repeatedly points out in his fiction that religion is a common cause for wars and human cruelty, and here it is suggested that Duffy's war too may be caused by religious obsession, manifested in his list of Biblical passages claiming that 'the world was full of sinners who if they didn't repent soon would be destroyed, not by flood this time but by the fires of a nuclear holocaust' (*JD* 65).

It soon becomes evident that the concept of moral hypocrisy in times of war is a recurrent issue in the novel, and has a significant bearing on the plot itself. The concept of war, moreover, determines Duffy's actions throughout the novel. As he declares his war against the 'Defilers of truth and abusers of authority' (*JD* 25), Duffy applies to himself the rules he has often questioned previously. The dangers inherent in Duffy's way of thinking

are obvious, yet Duffy's war at first consists merely of breaking into the local library where he, along with his 'army' of social misfits Helen Cooley, Mick Dykes, and Johnnie Crosbie, tears a page out of hundreds of books, a symbolic gesture meant to force people to face the truth about themselves, as Duffy believes that books are false representations of reality. Thereby the question of truth and its various representations in history and literature is brought to the fore through Duffy's symbolic acts. Moreover, by putting human excrement on the hymn books in one of the local churches, Duffy believes he will remind the upper class owners of the hymn books of their ordinary humanity, meaning that they should never regard themselves as superior to other people. The bizarre, almost surreal, connotations of this act seen through Cooley's thoughts of Duffy in the act as 'a minister giving communion' (*JD* 29) and of the act itself as 'anointing' (*JD* 111) reflect other instances in the plot where religious language is used and reinforce perceptions expressed elsewhere of Duffy as priest-like. Moreover, it is perhaps not surprising that the church is named after St Stephen, the first martyr in Christianity,⁴⁸ which fact again relates to how Duffy contemplates making a 'martyr' of himself towards the novel's conclusion.

Strange as these acts of 'war' may seem, they are 'innocent' in that they do not involve hurting or killing a fellow human being. Yet it is all along implied that Duffy's war, however morally justified, may eventually turn into something altogether more sinister. As Prillinger notes, with his declaration of war, Duffy 'puts himself beyond moral judgement and allows himself, in the name of morality, to act most immorally'.⁴⁹ Setting himself up as a judge, as morally just, and *justified*, Duffy initially decides that his war makes deceit 'necessary and permissible' (*JD* 61). In employing Mick Dykes and Johnny Crosbie for his war, he concedes that it would be symbolical to use 'evil to bring about good' (*JD* 30). Moreover, he threatens his friend Cooley with a knife when she refuses to help him defile the hymn books, and argues that 'In war the penalty for refusing an order is death' (*JD* 109). Duffy's moral ideals and his obsession with his war and its justification eventually leads to the novel's terrifying climax, when he bludgeons Crosbie's head with a brick to prevent Crosbie from betraying him to the police. Even as he commits the foul crime, he imagines himself as 'not an assassin or executioner but a deliverer' (*JD* 155). This perspective can be interpreted in two ways. What the novel tells us straightforwardly is that Duffy sees himself as delivering Crosbie from his pain caused by a mortal tumour on his brain. Alternatively, Duffy may here view himself as the deliverer of his society: what harm is there in one death, of a mortally ill boy at that, when this one death will guard the general interests of the people in ensuring the success of Duffy's moral campaign? We could argue, perhaps, that Duffy's initially well-intentioned idealism has become tainted with utilitarianism, the notion that his actions are justified if they are useful to or benefit the

majority of people.⁵⁰ In assuming the role of the all-knowing and morally justified leader of his crusade, and while seeing himself as the ‘embodiment of justice’,⁵¹ Duffy’s perspective also verges on religious fanaticism and even despotism. He is consumed by notions of ordered moral behaviour and has thus become a tyrant who sees his values as the only truth, and therefore believes in absolute justification whilst imposing these on other people.

Accordingly, what at first appears to be merely simple-minded and well-intentioned idealism rapidly becomes a justification for brutal and bloody murder. Duffy’s ideal of what is good and bad is at first simple: he believes there is more good than bad in most people and therefore that good will eventually have the upper hand if only given the chance by people themselves. Helen Cooley’s common sense counterpoints this; it tells us that the concept of good and bad is much more complicated than this, and therefore her point of view is highly significant in terms of the novel’s moral questioning and its representation of blurred boundaries between the binary opposites of good and evil: ‘... how did you measure goodness and badness? And what one person would call good another person might call bad. It was a lot more complicated than Duffy seemed to realise or was willing to admit’ (*JD* 28). As the story develops, this passage is increasingly relevant to the way in which Duffy’s ideal of good and evil is reversed through his own actions. Convincing himself that he is acting in the interests of a good and morally just cause, Duffy situates himself on the moral highground. As pointed out by Margery McCulloch—and comparable to Gavin Hamilton’s case—it is doubtful whether Duffy’s reputation for goodness is grounded on reality, when Duffy totally lacks human warmth: ‘Can such ‘goodness’ be true goodness? Is there not the arrogance of evil in his election of himself as jury and judge?’⁵² Duffy eventually commits an act of pure evil by killing a fellow human being who trusts him, and has thus ‘added “betrayal of trust” to his categories of defilers of truth and abusers of authority’.⁵³ He has come to represent precisely those things he aspired to eliminate; ultimately his naïve idealism and fanatical assurance of his moral worth befuddle his vision and prove him even more fallible than the people he formerly condemned for moral slackness. Even though Duffy realises this and does in the end decide to take responsibility for his actions, his degeneration from good to evil deconstructs the very idea of these binary opposites as laid out by him in the beginning of the novel.

Ultimately, Duffy’s war proves futile and wrong, and nothing much has changed at the novel’s conclusion, except that Duffy has realised the beauty inherent in people’s dependence on one another. Despite the serene atmosphere at the end, there is an underlying, uneasy feeling of a society at odds with itself, characterised by general disaffection, torn by class division, confused sense of value, and moral and social hypocrisy. Duffy’s final realisation does nothing to alter this, and we are left feeling that

nothing has really changed. Duffy will no doubt go to prison, or a lunatic asylum, and his war will soon be forgotten. In terms of the novel's treatment of morality, it seems that there is little to be done about the evil that resides in human society. A bitter vision seems contained within this urban decadence, as argued by Dickson: 'although goodness exists, the evil within us all inevitably overcomes it'.⁵⁴ However, Dickson takes the conclusion of *Just Duffy* a bit too far. Although Jenkins's vision is often pessimistic, he never explicitly states that evil has the upper hand in society but rather reveals it as an intrinsic part of human nature which people need to know and be wary of. At least, there is some kind of positiveness in the fact that Duffy's final thoughts show that he recognises the enormity of his mistake, even though Duffy himself is left as an outcast with little hope for the future. The novel is bleak in its resolution, but ambitious in its showing up of human inconsistency and moral fallibility.

On another level, Duffy's self-appointed position as a just and justified moral rectifier echoes certain aspects of extreme Calvinist thought. This suggests that Calvinism is still a strong influence on Scottish character and makes the novel more 'Scottish' in its focus, which is made more prominent by its portrayal of small-town life in twentieth century Lowland Scotland. Furthermore, although certain aspects of *Fergus Lamont* and *A Toast to the Lord* are related to Calvinist concepts of election and justification, *Just Duffy* has been cited as an even stronger manifestation of the influence of Calvinism on Jenkins's work. While maintaining that the novel is a 'suspenseful modern morality drama',⁵⁵ McCulloch also insists that *Just Duffy* is a twentieth century descendant of Hogg's *Justified Sinner*, since there is a relationship 'between Duffy's self-election as destroyer of evil and the behaviour of a Calvinist such as Robert Wringhim'.⁵⁶ McCulloch refers to numerous aspects of the novel which support this view. In Jenkins's pun on the title, 'just' comes to mean any one of three things. Firstly, inconsequential, as Duffy is no more than *just* Duffy, a youth with little impact or significance; secondly, right, fair, or impartial, as Duffy sets himself up as a judge who is fair and morally just; and thirdly, righteous or justified, as Duffy becomes righteous and justified in his actions because of the assumed moral rightness of his campaign. McCulloch's discussion of Duffy suggests that there is a connection between the title and the 'justified' sins of Robert Wringhim, and shows that the last two meanings of 'just' are closely related in terms of Duffy's ideals:

And so, *just* Duffy, with his perception of human inadequacy, becomes translated into *justified* Duffy who determines to wage war on 'the defilers of truth and abusers of authority' in order to bring them to a realisation of their sins, to repentance and to a re-ordering of their ways.⁵⁷

Moreover, as pointed out by McCulloch, 'ambiguity of character and moral ambivalence'⁵⁸ is evident here as elsewhere in Jenkins's fiction, and these are also narrative characteristics

of Hogg's *Justified Sinner*. The moral questioning that runs throughout, along with the well-known theme of the conflict between good and evil, demonstrate further affinities with Hogg's novel. *Just Duffy*, despite its very different setting and plot, emerges as a 're-exploration of the theme of a justified sinner',⁵⁹ and 'its protagonist Duffy a relation of the deluded or evil Robert Wringhim'.⁶⁰

However, McCulloch's careful analysis of Hogg's influence on Jenkins's novel fails to recognise how the split psyche (keeping in mind that this is a central idea in Hogg's *Justified Sinner* and other earlier Scottish works such as Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*) and the dissociation of personality which relates to this mental condition are represented in Jenkins's novel. Clearly, Duffy's degeneration from naive idealism to his ultimate and evil betrayal and murder of Johnny Crosbie involves a definite move from an obviously disturbed personality towards outright schizophrenia at the time of Crosbie's murder:

It did not seem to be himself, *but someone else*, who a few minutes later resolutely dragged Crosbie's body into a nearby close...

Then that someone else took off the dusty and bloody gloves and pushed them well down through a hole...

Duffy watched with horror all this being done. *He knew intimately this cool, active, thorough, and resolute person in the black jerkin spotted with blood, but seemed to have no influence over him.*

Together they ran home, Duffy panting and fearful, the other alert and silent.

It was ten past seven when *they* were back inside the house.

(JD 156, italics mine)

There have been hints before as to the duality of Duffy's character; the shrewd Cooley discovers two paintings in his room and notes that they are both of Duffy and almost identical (JD 63), and later she has 'a curious feeling that there were two Duffies in the room, the one watching the other all the time' (JD 104). Besides carrying echoes from Hogg's novel, Cooley's reflections already imply that Duffy may have something of the schizophrenic about him. However, it is only at the time of Crosbie's murder that Duffy starts perceiving himself as two people, while Cooley's understanding of him merely foreshadows this earlier in the story. Evidently, Duffy is here victim to mental dissociation; he is not one person but two, and is aware of this change. Robert Wringhim's schizophrenic state in *Justified Sinner* is a frequently discussed feature of that novel. Duffy's psychological state at the time of murdering Crosbie is a clear reminder of Robert's mental condition, and it is therefore surprising that McCulloch fails to include this aspect of *Just Duffy* in her analysis. Although the importance of dualism and schizophrenia has become somewhat of a cliché in the Scottish literary canon, *Just Duffy* is yet another manifestation of its continuity within Scottish tradition.

Jenkins has expressed his disappointment with the reception of *Just Duffy*, and seems to think that this might derive from his unusual decision not to use Scots dialogue in the novel. The use of Standard English, it appears, was applied because Jenkins hoped *Just Duffy* would have 'universal appeal'.⁶¹ Jenkins also claims to look on *Just Duffy* as one of his most optimistic books because of Duffy's ultimate discovery that 'there is something quite beautiful in the dependence of people on one another'.⁶² However, this view of *Just Duffy* is bound to puzzle most of Jenkins's readers because, despite Duffy's final positive vision, he is left without any hope for himself, a murderer about to be apprehended by the police, an outcast, a misfit in society, and barred forever from the life that he has just realised is beautiful. This confusion is shared by Gifford, who feels perplexed by Jenkins's claim:

Yes, Duffy may finally see the quiet friendliness of churchgoers as beautiful, but why does he have to [be] an outcast to see it? And can we trust Duffy's up till now pretty changeable perceptions? The claim for a hopeful ending seems ... a bit unconvincing and at the very least offset by the final image of permanently outcast Duffy waiting on the rubbish dump for police and authority to come for him.⁶³

Eventually, *Just Duffy* does not emerge as a hopeful novel, and certainly not when it comes to the fate of its protagonist.

Just Duffy reaffirms many of Jenkins's major concerns and is a startling evocation of contemporary moral and social issues, but it is debatable whether it works as a novel at all levels. For instance, is the character of Duffy convincing enough? Duffy is different in that he is a sixteen year old boy whose ethical awareness and psychological hang-ups make him entirely different from what we would call the 'standard teenager'. Duffy's concerns are those no 'normal' boy of his age would bother himself with, and therefore Duffy does not emerge as a convincing example of a teenager in our day and age. We will find it difficult to believe that a sixteen-year-old would take it upon himself to improve the moral standards of society. However, considering that Duffy *is* different, and is both seen as such by other characters and by himself, Jenkins does not necessarily mean him to be a convincing character. Rather, the author may see Duffy as operating more within the realms of fable than within realism. As with Gavin Hamilton, Duffy's prodigious disgust at humanity and his despair at the atrocities committed in the name of morality and religion emphasise social, religious and political hypocrisy, and are perhaps aimed at forcing us to acknowledge and deal with the moral and spiritual lassitude that characterises our world. Further, again comparable with Gavin and perhaps Agnes Tolmie also, Duffy is clearly a mentally disturbed person, with a family background and upbringing that have no doubt contributed to his peculiarities. He wants acceptance by his community, finds none when

denied a job by Mrs Porteous, and thus challenged, embarks on a campaign to prove his moral worth but which will, paradoxically, set him apart from humanity even further.

*

While this chapter has focused on *A Toast to the Lord*, *A Would-Be Saint*, *The Awakening of George Darroch*, and *Just Duffy*, it is important to mention here one of Jenkins's most recent publications, *Matthew and Sheila*, since this novel continues the movement towards extremes in Jenkins's later Scottish period, and shares the element of ambiguity and subversion that characterises the novels discussed in this chapter. Differing from the other novels, however, *Matthew and Sheila* initially sets out to establish the binary opposites of good and evil as epitomised by the children Matthew and Sheila, respectively.⁶⁴ This set of opposites does not survive long in its original form, though. For instance, through making Matthew become consumed with the idea that he is one of 'those favourites of God who could do no wrong, or rather who, if they did what in others would be called wrong, were immediately absolved and protected from punishment' (MS 3), Jenkins—possibly somewhat inadvertently—undermines the notion of Matthew as good. After all, Jenkins's portrayal of Calvinist ideology is extremely critical throughout his fiction, and Matthew's self-assigned notions of grace would therefore seem to contradict the novelist's own view of Matthew's good qualities. Further, as the story progresses, we become aware of flaws in Matthew's goodness, especially when considering his hatred of his new stepmother.⁶⁵ This view is supported by Douglas Gifford, who sees 'the classic juxtapositioning of apparent Good and Evil' as highly questionable, especially in light of Matthew's belief that he is 'justified' in seeking Sheila's help to destroy his step-mother.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the evil mentality of Sheila is never asserted, just hinted at, and then through Matthew who is the only person to whom Sheila shows her unpleasant side. All along, there is the possibility that Sheila's evil is merely an illusion, sustained by Matthew's vivid imagination and Sheila's possibly false boasts of doing evil deeds.

The boundaries between the concepts of good and evil as supposedly epitomised in Matthew and Sheila are thus increasingly blurred as the story develops. Eventually, we are left unsure about the qualities of either character. If Sheila is an evil murderer who eventually pushes Matthew's stepmother to her death down the stairs (despite the fact that Matthew no longer wishes to get rid of her), why has the good Matthew not revealed her crime to the appropriate authorities? Did Sheila really murder all the people she claims to have murdered, or is she merely telling Matthew these things to scare him? Can Sheila perhaps be read as Matthew's symbolic alter ego, an evil conscience, a second self, such as depicted in Gil-Martin in James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*? We are left pondering these questions and many more at the end of the novel, but since we are given no fixed answers to them in the text, we cannot but question the initial set up of good and

evil as suggested by Jenkins himself. Therefore the ultimate ambiguity concerning the characters of Matthew and Sheila shows how Jenkins's originally ordered concept of good and evil has been undermined, questioned, and ultimately deconstructed through his approach to the two characters. This appears unintentional on Jenkins's part, at least as far as Matthew is concerned, and thus Jenkins has here written a narrative which '*transgresses the law it appears to set up for itself*'.⁶⁷ When compared to *Just Duffy*, for example, we see something similar taking place when Duffy's original idea of good and evil is wholly undermined and obscured by his own subsequent actions. The difference is that the deconstruction of good and evil in *Matthew and Sheila* seems accidental while in *Just Duffy* it is clearly intentional.

Endnotes

- ¹ A version of parts of this chapter (i.e. those which deal with *Just Duffy* and *Matthew and Sheila*) has already been published in: Ingibjörg Agústs dóttir, 'Chaos and Dissolution: Deconstruction and Scotland in the Later Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 41 (November 2000): 103-116.
- ² Robin Jenkins, interview with Glenda Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', by Glenda Norquay, Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985, 441.
- ³ H.V. Morton, *Women of the Bible* (London: Methuen, 1940) 42.
- ⁴ Alan Bold, *Modern Scottish Literature* (New York: Longman, 1983) 207.
- ⁵ David Groves, 'James Hogg's *Confessions* and the Vale of Soul-Making', *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Nineteenth Century*, ed. Horst W. Drescher (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1985) 35.
- ⁶ Glenda Norquay, 'Robin Jenkins', *British Novelists Since 1960*, ed. Jay L. Halio, vol. 14 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit, USA: Gale Research, 1983) 437.
- ⁷ Glenda Norquay, 'Four Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s', *The History of Scottish Literature*, Vol. 4, ed. Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1989) 271.
- ⁸ *ibid* 271.
- ⁹ Bold 208.
- ¹⁰ See Personal Interview 17. Jenkins expressed his great surprise at Edwin Morgan's dismissal of the novel as being without irony.
- ¹¹ Edwin Morgan, *Essays* (Cheadle Hulme: Carcanet, 1974) 245.
- ¹² 'Quite a night', rev. of *A Toast to the Lord*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 11 August 1972: 935.
- ¹³ *ibid* 935.
- ¹⁴ Jenkins, interview with Norquay 442.
- ¹⁵ *ibid* 442.
- ¹⁶ Manfred Malzahn, *Aspects of Identity: The Contemporary Scottish Novel (1978-1981) as National Self-Expression* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984) 57.
- ¹⁷ Robin Jenkins, interview, 'The Symbolism of Good and Evil: Studies in the Novels of Robin Jenkins', by Winifride Logan, Diss., U of Glasgow, 1991, 48.
- ¹⁸ Glenda Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985, 301.
- ¹⁹ Manfred Malzahn, 'Where Extremes Meet in Midfield: The Aesthetics of Robin Jenkins', *Edinburgh Review* 106 (Spring 2001) 41.
- ²⁰ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 303.
- ²¹ Jenkins, interview with Norquay 442.
- ²² Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 296.
- ²³ Malzahn, *Aspects of Identity* 57.
- ²⁴ Norquay, 'Robin Jenkins' 437.
- ²⁵ Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism' 303.
- ²⁶ Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland* (London: Macmillan, 1984) 453.
- ²⁷ Douglas Gifford, 'Recent Scottish Fiction', *Books in Scotland* 2 (Autumn 1978): 12.
- ²⁸ Anne Stevenson, 'Presbyter writ large', rev. of *A Would-Be Saint*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 18 August 1978: 924.
- ²⁹ *ibid* 924.
- ³⁰ Paul Binding, 'Ambivalent Patriot: The Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *New Edinburgh Review* 53 (1981): 21.
- ³¹ Anne Stevenson 924.
- ³² During our interview in March 1997, Jenkins told me about a novel in his drawer that he hoped to publish soon. This novel focuses on the wife of James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, and is supposed to be entitled *The Lady Magdalena*. It has a clear historical basis and would be comparable to *The Awakening of George Darroch* in drawing on an event in Scottish history—the Covenanting Wars—that was of great consequence to Scottish religious life.
- ³³ Stewart Lamont, 'Two sides to the Disruption', *Glasgow Herald* 19 November 1985: 11.
- ³⁴ Glenda Norquay, 'Disruptions: The Later Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) 19.
- ³⁵ See Jack Webster, 'Jenkins pulls a novel from the top drawer', *Glasgow Herald* 18 November 1985: 1; Trevor Royle, 'What we need is more of Robin Jenkins', *Glasgow Herald* 19 November 1985: 11; Lamont, 'Two sides to the Disruption' 11; Douglas Dunn, 'Soul-shaking with sex', rev. of *The Awakening of George Darroch*, by Robin Jenkins, *Glasgow Herald* 23 November 1985: 11.
- ³⁶ Philip Howard, 'From the bodies of the kirk', rev. of *The Awakening of George Darroch*, by Robin Jenkins, *The Times* 28 November 1985: 11.
- ³⁷ Dunn, 'Soul-shaking with sex' 11. Dunn suggests that there is 'something prurient in the way Jenkins writes about sex'.
- ³⁸ *ibid* 11.

³⁹ Norquay, 'Disruptions' 22.

⁴⁰ Jenkins does use letters in some of his other novels, as in the case of Mary Holmscroft's letters to Fergus in *Fergus Lamont*, but these are not frequent and do not constitute such a significant part of the narrative itself as do the letters of Annabel.

⁴¹ Douglas Gifford, 'Recent Fiction: The Authentic Glasgow Experience: James Kelman's *A Chancer*', *Books in Scotland* 19 (Autumn 1985): 11.

⁴² Norquay, 'Disruptions' 21.

⁴³ It has been argued that *Just Duffy* is reminiscent of *The Boy Who Wanted Peace* by George Friel (1964), in presenting an 'adolescent from the slums in the West of Scotland, a protagonist who is a curious mixture of self-interest and idealism' (see Douglas Gifford, 'Spring Fiction: Dreams of Love and Justice', *Books in Scotland* 57 (Spring 1996): 13). Indeed, *Just Duffy* is the one novel by Jenkins where the possible influence of Friel on Jenkins's writing is clearly felt. As Gifford argues, there are clear similarities between *Just Duffy* and *The Boy Who Wanted Peace*, but there are also echoes from Friel's best known work, *Mr Alfred M.A.* (1972). In both novels, most of the young people come from the margins of society, and are seen wandering aimlessly around a world of poverty and unemployment, with nothing else to do than swear, steal, damage public property, and insult and harass their elders. The world of both novels is that of graffiti, vandalism, and petty crime, inhabited and to some extent created by restless and depraved young people, who have been betrayed by their own community and by the political upholding of the centuries-old class divisions of British society. Some further comparisons between *Just Duffy* and *Mr Alfred M.A.* are drawn by Horst Prillinger in his *Family and the Scottish Working Class Novel 1984-1994: A study of novels by Janice Galloway, Alasdair Gray, Robin Jenkins, James Kelman, A. L. Kennedy, William McIlvanney, Agnes Owens, Alan Spence, and George Friel* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000) 111-112.

⁴⁴ Prillinger 82.

⁴⁵ Norquay, 'Disruptions' 13.

⁴⁶ Beth Dickson, 'Recent Fiction: Familiar Themes of Good and Evil', *Books in Scotland* 28 (Summer 1988): 11.

⁴⁷ Colin Milton, 'Just Duffy by Robin Jenkins', *Scottish Literary Journal Supplement* 29 (Winter 1988): 27.

⁴⁸ St. Stephen is actually known as 'The Protomartyr' or the 'first Christian martyr'; charged for blasphemy, St. Stephen was condemned to death and stoned in c. AD 36. The story of St. Stephen is told in Acts, chapters 6-22.

⁴⁹ Prillinger 81.

⁵⁰ This is also what (by his own claims) governs Fergus's behaviour in *Fergus Lamont*; he wants to become an aristocrat and a famous poet to benefit his people in Gantock as their 'absolver and redeemer'.

⁵¹ Milton 28.

⁵² Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'What Crisis in Scottish Fiction? Creative Courage and Cultural Continuity in Novels by Friel, Jenkins and Kelman', *Cencrastus* 48 (1994): 16-17.

⁵³ Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'Hogg's *Justified Sinner* and Robin Jenkins's *Just Duffy*', *Studies in Hogg and his World* 6 (1995): 16.

⁵⁴ Dickson, 'Recent Fiction' 11.

⁵⁵ Margery Palmer McCulloch, Introduction, *Just Duffy*, by Robin Jenkins (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1995) v.

⁵⁶ *ibid* viii.

⁵⁷ McCulloch, 'Hogg's *Justified Sinner* and Robin Jenkins's *Just Duffy*' 15.

⁵⁸ *ibid* 14.

⁵⁹ *ibid* 13.

⁶⁰ McCulloch, 'What Crisis in Scottish Fiction?' 16.

⁶¹ Personal Interview 17.

⁶² *ibid* 17.

⁶³ Gifford, 'Spring Fiction' 13.

⁶⁴ Jenkins maintains that he was trying to portray true goodness in Matthew, and pure evil in Sheila. He is of the opinion that he succeeded as far as Matthew is concerned, but remains unsure about Sheila, whom he refers to as 'a mysterious character'. See Personal Interview 17.

⁶⁵ For a different critical perspective, which sees Matthew's goodness as unquestionable, and the novel as 'a study in goodness, or ... in the emergence of goodness', see Paul Binding, 'Liberating the Elect', rev. of *Matthew and Sheila*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 18 December 1998: 20.

⁶⁶ Douglas Gifford, 'Autumn Fiction: Good Times, Bad Times', *Books in Scotland* 67 (Autumn 1998): 4.

⁶⁷ Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989) 90.

Chapter 4:

Self-reflection and Re-examination: *Poverty Castle* (1991), *Willie Hogg* (1993), and *Poor Angus* (2000)¹

In certain respects, the three novels discussed in this chapter are dissimilar, set in different locations (Argyll, Glasgow/Arizona, Islay, respectively), and focusing on different types of characters from mixed social backgrounds. The issues dealt with in *Poverty Castle*, *Willie Hogg*, and *Poor Angus* also vary considerably, encapsulating several different strands of Jenkins's moral and social concerns. Nevertheless, the three narratives continue Jenkins's exploration of the ambiguous nature of goodness and moral fallibility, the conjunction of social idealism and human self-interest, and the limits of self-knowledge, while the narrative developments of *Willie Hogg* highlight once more Jenkins's interest in religion and the elusive possibility of spiritual affirmation.

Importantly, *Poverty Castle*, *Willie Hogg*, and *Poor Angus* reveal how Jenkins's writing becomes increasingly self-reflective during the last decade of his career. The old novelist in *Poverty Castle*, and the eponymous protagonists of *Willie Hogg* and *Poor Angus* can all be read as in some ways related to the author himself: a novelist trying to write a novel that can celebrate goodness without irony, and yet be truthful about the world's morally degenerate state; an atheist searching for spiritual affirmation, whose grief for his wife is portrayed in a highly intimate manner; an artist returned to Scotland from the Far East, determined to find artistic inspiration in his native land. Elements of each character's attributes and experience are comparable with aspects of Jenkins's own life experience and opinions, and their function and development arguably reflect Jenkins's need to re-examine and reflect back on his central fictional concerns, his literary achievement, and his role as an artist in Scotland. In these novels also, Jenkins is shown to slip in narrative details or descriptions which refer directly to himself and his circumstances, but which are too subtle for most readers to realise their inherently self-revealing nature. Parts of this chapter will therefore draw attention to those elements of *Poverty Castle*, *Willie Hogg*, and *Poor Angus* that are most explicitly self-reflective.

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The narrative form of *Poverty Castle*, and the novel's function as metafiction, constitutes a break from Jenkins's usual narrative methods. It is, on the one hand, the story of a dying novelist, Donald, who wants his last novel to be 'a celebration of goodness, without any need of irony' (PC 7). On the other hand, it is the novel Donald writes, which focuses on the Sempill family—father, mother, and five girls—who use part of their inherited fortune to buy a derelict house, which they name Poverty Castle, in Kilcalmonell (Kilmory). The

Sempills seem the model of happiness and success, and appear to have a close and loving relationship. The second half of the novel-within-a-novel then introduces Peggy Gilchrist, university room-mate of the eldest Sempill girl, and charts the relationship between Peggy and the Sempills, as well as gives insight into Peggy's working class background.

We could categorise *Poverty Castle* as a novel that initially—and according to Donald's plan—establishes an atmosphere of happiness, success, love, and benevolence. At first sight, the Sempills seem to fit Donald's model of goodness and fulfil the image of his characters being happy 'because they deserved to be happy' (*PC* 7). The handsome, rather awkward, and affable Edward Sempill is presented as the idealistic do-gooder, eager to please his family and yearning 'to be a philanthropist' (*PC* 34). In Kilcalmonell, he is admired by the women and envied by the men. Similarly, his wife, who adores him, is cheerful, glamorous and beautiful, and admired by the local men. The five Sempill girls, Diana, the twins Effie and Jeanie, Rowena and Rebecca (all named after Walter Scott's heroines) are equally beautiful and gifted; they are self-assured and intelligent, and have much say in family matters despite their young age. After the Sempills buy Poverty Castle and settle in Kilcalmonell, the narrative further establishes their goodness and charity; the family, and especially Mr Sempill, appear concerned with more unfortunate members of society, such as the tinkers who have settled in their caravans on the local beach. In short, the Sempills seem to have it all, success as well as charity, and even though their wealth makes life infinitely easier for them, the outside perspective of the schoolmistress indicates that their personal qualities contribute most of all to their happiness: 'Miss McGill had heard that the Sempills were well-off. ... But it was in themselves that their greatest riches lay' (*PC* 96).

However, the narrative soon reveals cracks in this positive, almost Edenic, image of the Sempills and their world. As Horst Prillinger notes in his detailed analysis of the novel,² we come to realise that the Sempills' happiness derives from their isolation from and ignorance of the outside world:

... the Sempills base their happiness on ignorance, on not knowing and not wanting to know what goes on around them ... The Sempills do not even seem to have a radio or TV set; they are thus blissfully isolated (or perhaps protected) from the atrocities that go on in the world.³

Indeed, the name 'Sempill' seems appropriate in this context, as Jenkins's obvious play on its similarity to 'simple' reinforces the idea of the Sempills as 'innocent', or lacking knowledge of the world.⁴ Other aspects of the plot create a sense of unease in our reading of the Sempill family. For instance, there are constant allusions to Edward Sempill's fondness for drink, while we are told at an early stage that his wife is often strangely 'absent' in the midst of her family. Mrs Sempill explains this mental absence to her

daughters as a journey to 'elfland looking for your little brother' (*PC* 14). Here, there is already a hint of instability in her character, which will become more apparent as the story progresses. The suggestion of Sempill's alcoholism and his wife's growing obsession with a male child disrupt earlier suggestions of perfect harmony and understanding among the Sempills. Neither of these underlying problems are openly discussed or resolved within the family nor through the external narrative perspective. Rather, they are hushed up, as if bringing them out in the open would shatter the image of the Sempills as a model of happiness and success. Throughout, there is a feeling that rejecting these underlying problems is highly problematic and will have negative repercussions later on. Indeed, frequent references to the danger of Mrs Sempill having another child, combined with her obsession to give her husband a male heir, clearly foreshadow the ultimate tragedy of her death in childbirth.

Further elements of the narrative undermine and render ambiguous the initially positive image of the Sempills. That the Sempills choose to name their new home 'Poverty Castle' is, of course, highly ironic, as the name is oxymoronic by implication and highlights the paradox that lies at the heart of the Sempills' supposed happiness. Further, Jenkins's portrayal of the Sempills' charity implies that their sympathy would, in fact, be limited if they were faced with the problematic reality of actually engaging with the poor. It is suggested that Edward Sempill, though he appears genuine in his concern for the poor—he has given ten thousand pounds of his legacy to charities—is really an ineffectual man whose high-flown ideals of charity and equality are never really put to the test. Certainly, the fact that his scholarly attempts at writing a book on Walter Scott's heroines have come to nothing (he is stuck at page 18) reflects on his feebleness. Significantly, Sempill is referred to as a 'theoretical socialist' (*PC* 211), while the fact that he secretly dreams of being knighted, despite his frequent criticism of aristocrats, further underlines the ambiguous quality of his ideals. A similarly ironic approach is taken to Sempill's five daughters. Their sympathy and sense of social justice, induced mainly through their father's influence, are purely academic and naïve. For instance, their reaction to their father's idea of inviting the tinker children to Poverty Castle reveals that their sympathy does not stretch very far: 'All the same, if he did invite some tinker children, though they hoped he wouldn't, they would do their best to make him [*sic*] feel welcome. "We wouldn't patronise them," said Jeanie' (*PC* 92). Indeed, Jeanie's claim stands in sharp contrast with Diana's later comment that 'one of the cardinal sins of the Sempills is to patronise people' (*PC* 228). The possibility that the Sempills have more snobbery than at first appears is thus present throughout the narrative.

Does Donald therefore fail in his intention to make his novel a 'celebration of goodness'? Whereas Douglas Gifford and Glenda Norquay both emphasise the ambiguity of the goodness portrayed here (in the Sempills),⁵ Prillinger's contention is that Donald does manage to represent a model of 'genuine goodness', but that it is not the Sempill family who fulfil this model, but Peggy Gilchrist.⁶ Prillinger's argument is interesting because it highlights what the other two critics overlook in their analysis, namely how important the character of Peggy is in the novel. At first, Peggy seems to be a side-line character, but she is steadily given more attention in the text, so that finally it is she who stands at the centre of interest instead of the Sempills. Prillinger defines this movement in the text as a reversal:

From the point of her introduction onwards, she [Peggy] progressively takes up more and more space while the Sempills lose more and more ground. At the end of the novel positions have effectively been reversed: by then, most of the narrative is narrated from her point of view and the Sempills have become mere points of reference. If the position at the beginning was how much better the Sempills are, then at the end it is Peggy who is obviously superior to them.⁷

As Prillinger suggests, the Sempills are not happy 'because they *deserve* to be happy but rather because they can *afford* to' (his italics).⁸ Peggy, however, deserves to be happy—she is kind-hearted, modest and intelligent—but she is not happy, at least not obviously so. Also, her acquaintance with the Sempills works against her happiness in the sense that their extravagant, colourful life shows her a more positive alternative to her own economically limited and ordinary existence. What little happiness there may be in her life is disrupted by her contradictory emotions of yearning to be one of the Sempills while also feeling guilty at being a traitor to her family and class.

It is in this context that Peggy's most important function in the novel becomes evident. Although she is introduced late in the story, we are soon given considerable insight into her background, views and psychology. A passionate scholar of history, she has developed a shrewd understanding of the political, industrialist, and capitalist forces that have formed her society. She is deeply aware of the unfairness of class division and the hypocrisy of those who uphold the class system. She is a republican and wants royalty and titled aristocracy to be abolished, and her ideals accordingly clash with Diana Sempill's, who is engaged to a baronet's son, and believes that 'In spite of their shortcomings it had been the nobility of Scotland who had given the country whatever distinction it had' (PC 174). As opposed to Diana Sempill's naïve passion on behalf of the poor, Peggy always stays 'cool' (PC 170), but it is revealed that Diana's interest in the working classes is purely academic, as part of her preparation for 'when she became Lady Campton, mistress of servants' (PC 242), whereas Peggy's detached, often sarcastic, view

of her class disguises her genuine ambition for social justice. Indeed, Peggy's social ideals are in sharp contrast to everything the Sempill family stands for. And yet she longs to be one of them, to be called Peggy Sempill—reminiscent of Tom Curdie wanting to be one of the Forbes family in *The Changeling*—and to live with them in Poverty Castle. This is what causes Peggy's inner conflict of ambition, guilt, and self-reproach; she feels that she is betraying her family, who have made sacrifices for her university education: 'They had made the sacrifices, they were still making them, and she was repaying them by depriving them of their existence so that she could see herself as one of the Sempills' (PC 232). In fact, Peggy is the only true moral pilgrim of *Poverty Castle*, despite her late entry. It is she who brings into the narrative a feeling of balance, sensibility, and genuine insight, both on a universal and a personal level. She accepts that the 'contradiction between idealistic intention and pragmatic performance' is part of the human condition (PC 230), and realises that she is fallible herself and thus liable to fail her social ideals. This is the main reason why she puts off accepting the invitation to Poverty Castle: 'She had been afraid of being subverted. There was a part of her only too ready to give in and go over to the enemy. The Sempills would have made her defection too easy and pleasant' (PC 255).

Prillinger argues that Peggy's 'limited but genuine goodness' triumphs over the Sempills' artificiality.⁹ I would suggest that Peggy triumphs over the Sempills in other ways also: it is really only after Peggy's introduction that the story becomes truly convincing, and it is eventually she who is the real protagonist of the novel, and not the Sempills. Notwithstanding the ambiguous nature of the Sempills' goodness and happiness, there is something superficial in Donald's/Jenkins's overall portrayal of them. They seem too good to be true; indeed, they are almost like characters out of a fairy tale. On the other hand, the character of Peggy Gilchrist seems solidly founded on reality. Despite her deprived background, she is intelligent and brave, and even while having socialist and pacifist ideals, she is realistic about the problems that hinder their realisation. Contrary to the Sempills, she is well aware of the world's many cruelties, or, in Prillinger's words, 'bases her outlook on life on reality, whereas the Sempills have based their happiness on fictions'.¹⁰ As readers, we can easily identify with Peggy's agonies of conscience, whereas we are prone to feel sceptical of, and even irritated by, the Sempills' self-indulgent, hyperbolic 'happiness'. For readers who are conscious of Jenkins's other work, of the issues it raises, and of its predominantly working class focus, Peggy's intense self-interrogation, along with the social and moral questions introduced through her perspective, will strike a familiar chord. Indeed, it is possible that Donald/Jenkins simply introduces Peggy halfway through his novel as compensation for his superficial and

'unreal' portrayal of the Sempills. The indisputable reality inhabited by Peggy thus replaces the isolated make-believe world of the Sempills.

The conclusion of the novel-within-a-novel is further important in relation to our interpretation of Peggy's role. The novel ends shortly after Mrs Sempill dies in childbirth, but the narrative focus is on Peggy as she prepares to go to the funeral, seen through the eyes of her fellow student, Sadie:

'Good luck anyway,' said Sadie, and added, more to herself than to Peggy, 'and I don't just mean at the funeral.' She couldn't help giving her blessing for what it was worth to a girl who had nothing and didn't seem to mind. (PC 325)

The conclusion is a blessing for Peggy's future, but it is also a positive statement on Peggy's modest, unpretentious and magnanimous personality. The narrative therefore concludes on a note of optimism as far as Peggy is concerned. The Sempills' tragedy remains in the background precisely because Peggy is now the real protagonist, and therefore it is not necessary to take the narrative any further. Accordingly, and contrary to Norquay's comment that 'the story is left incomplete, with the author dying just before the end',¹¹ I would agree with Prillinger's contention that Donald has, in fact, finished his novel.¹² Why, otherwise, does his wife find him 'not busy at his desk, but seated in the armchair, with his hands clasped on his lap *and the remnants of a smile on his face*' (PC 326, italics mine)? We have repeatedly been told that Donald is worried about leaving his characters 'lost in limbo' (PC 165) or in 'the lurch' (PC 300). If they have been left in limbo, would he really be smiling? Jessie, his wife, assumes that the novel has been left unfinished: 'she had read the book from the beginning and found that the last chapter had not been written' (PC 327). Even after seeing the smile on Donald's face, Jessie still comments to their daughter that it would have troubled her husband, 'during that last minute, knowing that it [the novel] wasn't finished' (PC 327). The view of Donald's novel as being unfinished relies solely on Jessie's interpretation, which is clearly subjective and misguided, and should therefore not be taken at face value.

While *Poverty Castle* is among the less critically successful of Jenkins's later novels, it is certainly one of the most interesting in the context of Jenkins's overall achievement. For instance, Donald's attempt to celebrate goodness, and yet be truthful and triumphant of the morally degenerate state of the world, both emphasises and mirrors the yearning present throughout Jenkins's fiction for an attainable level of goodness that transcends human frailties. Donald's self-conscious quest for moral perfection in the form of fiction-writing is in itself correlative to the numerous characters in Jenkins's fiction who long to be an example of charity and selflessness in an otherwise selfish and corrupt world. The revelation that Donald's novel fails to portray morality in such straightforward, binary

terms then corresponds with Jenkins's overall presentation of human morality in his fiction, and with the fact that the apparently well-meaning idealism of Jenkins's protagonists usually proves fallible, limited, even false, and their charity devalued through their implicitly selfish motives.

What is also fascinating about *Poverty Castle* is its implicitly metafictional quality. Through the story of Donald and his novel, Jenkins comments on the nature of fiction-making and emphasises the problems of portraying reality through literature. For a long time, Donald has hoped to write a novel that will celebrate goodness, but without irony. Set against his goal is his awareness that the evils and injustices of the world have proliferated in the twentieth century:

Fear of nuclear holocausts increased. Millions guzzled while millions starved. Everywhere truth was defiled, authority abused. Those shadows darkened every thinking person's mind: he could not escape them. They would make it hard for his novel to succeed. (*PC* 7)¹³

Donald's wife argues that the world's condition, combined with Donald's pessimistic vision of humanity, make his task practically inconceivable. As the novel-within-a-novel progresses, the validity of Jessie's view becomes apparent. She notices how Donald has 'cheated' by making the Sempill family wealthy, and thus made things easy for them (*PC* 54), and she perceives the name *Poverty Castle* as 'blatant irony' (*PC* 55). Importantly, Jessie's comments highlight the ambiguous quality of the Sempills' goodness, as well as demonstrate that Donald is not, in fact, able to write a story without irony. His essentially realistic view of the complex state of human morality prevents him. The metanovel thus questions the ability of literature to do justice to the complexities and paradoxes that characterise society and human moral capacity.

Furthermore, the metafictional quality of *Poverty Castle* is arguably related to the essentially self-reflective nature of the novel, since the efforts of Donald the novelist have an obvious relevance to Jenkins himself. Glenda Norquay touches on this idea when suggesting that *Poverty Castle* 'may be read as a form of retrospective analysis of the writer's work',¹⁴ and that it serves as an 'ironic comment' on Jenkins's own 'inability to settle for the comfortable and comforting'.¹⁵ I would suggest that the self-reflective element is even more directly personal than this, because there are obvious parallels between Jenkins himself and Donald the novelist. Anticipating Donald's wish to celebrate goodness in his novel, Jenkins has expressed a similar desire: 'I thought in my mellow old age I would write novels to reconcile myself to humanity; the sun shining, everyone laughing merrily, the gates of heaven opening, but, alas, no'.¹⁶ The initial portrayal of the Sempills and their world corresponds with Jenkins's words, and the fact that Donald fails to convincingly portray true goodness and happiness in the Sempills further reinforces the

similarity of the two novelists' ambition, and the impossibility of this being realised. There are other obvious affinities between Jenkins and his fictitious writer: Jessie's comment that Donald has always been 'severe' on his characters (*PC* 7-8) echoes Jenkins's statement that he is severe on his characters and on himself;¹⁷ Donald's feeling that 'because he had been born and brought up amongst them the Scots were the only people he felt competent to portray' (*PC* 9) reiterates Jenkins's own opinions on the issue;¹⁸ Donald's statement on Scotland as 'The only country in history that, offered a modest degree of self-government, refused it' (*PC* 9) occurs elsewhere in Jenkins's writing, in slightly different form;¹⁹ and like Jenkins himself, Donald has written many novels but has not enjoyed wide recognition or success. There are other, more trivial, but striking, similarities: like Jenkins's own house, Donald's overlooks the Firth of Clyde and is situated not far from the Holy Loch; the name *Poverty Castle* is based on the old name of Jenkins's house, which used to be Poverty Hall;²⁰ and even Harvey the white cat seems based on Jenkins's own domestic pet.²¹ Thus, as Douglas Gifford argues, there is 'a feel of something deeply personal' in Jenkins's portrayal of Donald.²² *Poverty Castle* could accordingly be read not only as metanovel, but also as a highly idiosyncratic Künstlerroman, in which Jenkins reflects ironically on his writing career and examines his own approaches to human morality.

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Of all the novels discussed in this chapter, *Willie Hogg* perhaps fits most clearly the aims of this thesis in being focused specifically on individual self-confrontation and self-discovery. Partly set in Glasgow's Cowcaddens, it is the story of Willie Hogg, a retired hospital porter, known and liked for his decency and calmness, and his apparently simple wife, Maggie. The couple get the sudden news that Maggie's missionary sister, Elspeth, is dying of cancer on her Christian mission to the Navajo Indians in the Arizona desert, and after one of Willie's friends gets a local tabloid newspaper interested in their story, a publicity fund is set up for them to travel to Arizona. The journey to America marks a major change: Maggie, formerly portrayed as a lost and bewildered simpleton who is hardly able to cross a street by herself, becomes sensible, confident and determined, while Willie feels nervous and vulnerable. During their journey and their stay in the Navajo reservation, Willie is forced to reassess Maggie's abilities, his feelings for her, and his own views of humanity and religion. The novel ends tragically as Maggie dies suddenly of a heart attack, following which Willie travels back to Glasgow to bury her.

Willie Hogg is a third-person narrative, but different from much of Jenkins's fiction, the narrative focus stays predominantly with one character, so that other characters and events are presented almost entirely through the viewpoint of Willie Hogg himself. There are exceptions, though, especially during those scenes when Willie meets his friends

in *The Airlie Arms*, but these, for instance, reveal the views of Charlie, Angus, and Alec on Maggie as being 'Willie's lifelong burden' (WH 11), and suggest that Willie has a 'tender conscience' (WH 156). In this manner, we are given some external interpretation of Willie's life with Maggie and of Willie's own character. But the journey to America is presented through Willie's perspective, and we are never allowed knowledge of the thoughts of Maggie, Elspeth, or Randy, Elspeth's husband. In the context of narrative form, therefore, *Willie Hogg* is comparable to that small group of narratives in Jenkins's oeuvre, which includes *Some Kind of Grace* and some of the short stories in *A Far Cry From Bowmore* ('Siddiq', 'Bonny Chung', and 'Imelda and the Miserly Scot'), where Jenkins chooses to depict events through a restricted point of view, focusing primarily on the thoughts and feelings of one main character. This limited omniscience contrasts with most of Jenkins's other fiction (except those novels narrated in the first person), where the narrative focus shifts frequently from one character to another, and where narrative access to the protagonist is even removed for significant periods of time. The narrow focus of *Willie Hogg* means that the plot seems more straightforward and has less in the way of subplots than do the majority of Jenkins's third person narratives. When compared to *Poverty Castle*, for instance, the difference in narrative approach is clear, even when we consider only the novel-within-a-novel, where the narrative focus is frequently moved between main characters, first within the Sempill family and then between some of the family members and Peggy Gilchrist.

Willie Hogg is one of those pilgrim figures in Jenkins's fiction whose move towards new self-awareness is caused by the displacement from a familiar environment and the confrontation with an unknown, alien territory. In this context, it is significant that Willie and Maggie do not merely travel from one city to another, or from one Western and white culture to another, but are instead transferred from an enclosed, even parochial, urban locale to the desert landscape of Arizona, where they encounter the very different culture of the Navajo Indians. It is this extreme dislocation of both physical self and inner sensibility that forces Willie to realise Maggie's qualities and his love for her, and to rethink his relationship with religion and humanity. In line with the journeys of Sheila McNair in *The Tiger of Gold* and of Hugh Macpherson in 'A Far Cry From Bowmore', individual self-discovery and physical travel are interdependent in the development of Willie.

The idea of dislocation also works on another level, since Maggie's 'rebirth' is presented as a direct result of leaving Scotland; significantly, she starts speaking 'proper' English (WH 52) at the beginning of their journey, and never speaks Scots again until at the moment of her death. The novel toys with the possibility that Maggie is able to

transform from bewilderment to confidence merely because she has escaped the limitations imposed on her by her background. Perhaps, the poverty and class-prejudice of her environment have forced her to retreat into herself and to project an image of simple-mindedness and vulnerability to the outside world. At the same time, it is questionable whether Maggie's 'blossoming' (*WH* 63) is entirely convincing. Her transformation is so sudden and so radical that it seems as if she has been freed from a spell, but the novel leaves a questionmark as to whether this transformation would have lasted. After all, Maggie's rebirth coincides with her adoption of Standard English, and this may indicate that she is repressing her true, or native, self (Scots) in favour of a false, or foreign, self (English). What has been referred to as a contradiction between thought and emotion in Scottish character (Edwin Muir's definition of the Scottish 'dissociation of sensibility' in *Scott and Scotland* (1936)) is clearly relevant here, especially since Maggie relapses into Scots just before she dies, saying 'Oh Willie, haud me, please haud me' (*WH* 119). It could be argued that it is really her true self that resurfaces in this scene, and that her transformation was therefore merely transitory.

On the other hand, there is also the possibility that other people, including Willie himself, have all along underestimated, or even disregarded, Maggie's personal qualities. This possibility is indicated, for example, when Willie reflects that he 'was proud of this new Maggie or perhaps it was just the old Maggie that he had never made enough effort to discover' (*WH* 80). In this context, Maggie's rebirth is significant to Willie's development towards self-knowledge. He questions himself severely as he notices Maggie's new assurance, and his thoughts suggest that he has underestimated her, perceived himself above her, both in terms of her intelligence and integrity, and thus contributed towards her bewildered dependency on him. We are told that when Willie married Maggie he had thought that perhaps there 'could be riches in her that kindness and patience would uncover' (*WH* 3), but it is only now, after almost fifty years of marriage, that Willie really discovers these riches. During their journey to Arizona, their roles are effectively reversed; it is now Willie who draws strength from Maggie's resolution instead of the opposite: 'He would have to rely on Maggie. Two days ago that would have seemed ludicrous. Now it didn't' (*WH* 62). The realisation of Maggie's qualities sets off Willie's guilt and self-questioning, and he wonders, for instance, whether things would have been different if they had had children:

Would her blossoming have taken place many years ago and not waited till now, when she was nearly seventy? There could be no doubt that he had helped to delay it. Everybody, including himself, had thought it was she who had put a blight on him, but he realised now that it would be just as true to say that he had blighted her. He had taken away her self-confidence. He had never been fair to her. (*WH* 63)

On the mission, Willie repeatedly accuses himself thus, in his thoughts as well as when speaking to Elspeth and to Randy (*WH* 86, 98, 106, 108, 120). In this sense, it is not only Maggie who changes, since leaving Glasgow and travelling to a foreign place has made Willie realise his own shortcomings, resulting in his resolution to make amends to Maggie for underestimating her. Combined with this is the realisation that he truly loves Maggie: 'Why had it taken him so long to admit that he loved and needed her?' (*WH* 118). However, Willie never expresses these feelings to his wife, and throughout it seems that their relationship is characterised by very limited emotional exchange. The tragic irony, of course, is that Maggie dies before Willie gets the chance to show his love and admiration in what he sees as adequate terms. Following her death, he is possessed by a 'curious anger' against himself: 'He had left so many things undone. That Cross on top of the church for instance. He had promised Elspeth to climb up and straighten it' (*WH* 120). It is as if straightening the cross and thereby showing respect for Elspeth's God would simultaneously have been Willie's expression of love for Maggie.

The idea of straightening the cross is further important in relation to the novel's presentation of religion and spirituality. These issues are crucial to Willie's personal development and to our reading of his character. Like Jenkins himself, Willie is a professed atheist, but like many other non-believers in Jenkins's fiction (Bell McShelvie of *Guests of War*, Rollo the policeman in *The Missionaries*, John McLeod of *Some Kind of Grace*, and others), Willie is repeatedly shown to question his atheistic stance. As Tony Mathieson comments, 'Few of Jenkins's characters are labelled as atheists and then left to get on with their disbelief'.²³ This is certainly true of Willie. He can neither believe nor repudiate entirely the possibility of otherworldly influence, and after his arrival in Arizona it emerges that he is really searching for some kind of spiritual affirmation, despite his many years of atheism. As they come to Elspeth's mission, Willie's thoughts indicate this clearly:

He had always had a hankering for lonely places and here was loneliness indeed and in spite of his Socialist Sunday upbringing he had had all his life a sense of wonder, a feeling that, if conditions were right, which might happen once in a life-time, unaccountable things could happen. Was this such a place? Were these the right conditions? (*WH* 78)

Willie professes not to believe in God, but God is constantly in his thoughts. Willie's soul is 'dampened ... with a life-time of incredulity', but he nevertheless yearns to experience the 'fire in the soul' that he associates with genuine faith (*WH* 102). He consistently ponders over the possibility of God, and questions his own views of religion. In fact, it is debatable whether Willie is really a true atheist. To him, the existence of God, as well as life after death, are not proven, but neither does he entirely reject them. And even if he

does not believe in God, there is a strong indication that he at least *respects* God. Straightening the cross on Elspeth's church may be Willie's own peculiar way of expressing his love for Maggie and seeking reassurance amidst his grief, but it is also implicitly his homage to God and Christianity.

Important also to Willie's religious questioning is Elspeth, missionary to the Navajo Indians, dying of cancer but refusing to go into hospital, bravely fighting the illness and pain through her religious faith. At first, we are encouraged, through Willie's perspective, to view Elspeth with scepticism, and Elspeth seems comparable to characters like Agnes Tolmie of *A Toast to the Lord* in her extreme, unquestioning religiosity. But Willie's scepticism of Elspeth and her faith is soon replaced by respect and admiration for her, for the joy she finds in her missionary work, for the sincerity of her desire to gain the Navajos' trust—she speaks their language fluently—and for her physical endurance. Ultimately, Elspeth comes to represent for Willie the ever-present, but elusive, possibility of spiritual affirmation. Thus Willie attaches great significance to attending his sister-in-law's Sunday church service:

Willie had often maintained ... that he had never met anyone who had wholly convinced him that he or she truly believed in God. [...]

But had he now met someone who might pass the test? That she was his sister-in-law and had been born in a two-room-and kitchen in the Cowcaddens hardly disqualified her. Hadn't Christ been born in a stable? He had been made aware of the joy she felt but he had not been able to share it. He had suspected it might be a bizarre consequence of the cancer destroying her body. At the service this afternoon he might find out. It could be the most important event in his life. (WH 103)

What constitutes Willie's expectations is made obvious during the service, as he reflects: 'Was God here, in this cheap church, in the person of this sick tormented woman in the black gown?' (WH 104). Willie looks for a sign, something that would make him feel the 'fire in the soul' (WH 102 and 104) and give him spiritual certainty. But Willie is not allowed this kind of epiphany and, ultimately, the possibility of otherworldly, divine influence on human existence remains as elusive here as elsewhere in Jenkins's fiction.

Willie Hogg is haunted throughout by the elusive possibility of spiritual affirmation, and echoes clearly the dichotomous nature of Jenkins's overall approach to religion and spirituality in his work. Further, able neither to accept God nor to repudiate Him, Willie's confusion over the possibility of God and spirituality seems correlative with Jenkins's own ambivalent and paradoxical outlook on religion as presented in his fiction. It could therefore be argued that Jenkins's portrayal of Willie Hogg is implicitly self-reflective. Besides Willie's confused atheism, other aspects of the narrative highlight this possibility. Like Jenkins himself, Willie got married by declaration (WH 64),²⁴ and though perhaps a minor detail, the fact that one of Willie's favourite boyhood stories is *Riders of*

the Purple Sage by Zane Gray (*WH* 70) establishes another parallel between the author and his character.²⁵ More importantly, Jenkins has experienced deep personal loss at the death of his own wife, which is clearly reflected in his compassionate and entirely convincing portrayal of Willie's grief for Maggie. This, however, is never over-sentimental or melodramatic, only infinitely touching, while Jenkins's sharp ironic wit counterbalances the tragedy. For instance, despite the sadness of the scene, we cannot but laugh when reading about Willie's visit to the Kelvingrove Art Galleries after he returns to Glasgow. First, we can sense Willie's desolation as he looks at the paintings, trying (in vain) to believe that he will see Maggie again. But as the narrative focus is briefly shifted onto the museum attendants, comedy replaces tragedy. When Willie tells the enquiring attendant somewhat incongruously about his trip to Arizona, and his wife's death there, the attendant's reaction is that of incredulity:

Not being a reader of the *Daily Chronicle* he had never heard of Willie Hogg. He was sure he was talking to a lunatic.

He was strengthened in this belief when the old man took from his pocket a woman's necklace of blue beads, saying, 'The Indians gave her this.'

It was some film he had seen on television. Being senile, he had got it mixed up with reality. Probably he had bought the necklace at the Barrows.

'Before I left I straightened the Cross on the church.'

The attendant stared after him. Religious dementia. That must be it. The poor old fellow thought he could perform miracles. (*WH* 145)

Not only does the idea of Willie Hogg as being religiously demented seem ludicrously funny, but the attendant's incredulity also emphasises how far removed from ordinary Glasgow experience is Willie's and Maggie's journey. Judging Willie's clothes as 'plebeian' (*WH* 144), the attendant cannot imagine that Willie can truly have gone to Arizona. Jenkins's irony works on several levels here, underlining the problems of communication in a class-divided society, as well as stressing the extraordinary nature of Willie's experience.

In addition to the parallels there exist between Jenkins and his protagonist, there is another interesting twist to the narrative which emphasises its self-reflective quality. *Willie Hogg* is comparable to *Poverty Castle* in seemingly presenting a character that directly represents Jenkins himself, although in this case the character is only minor, introduced through Willie as he tells his friends about the poem he is going to read at Maggie's graveside. This poem was written by a man whom Willie heard read in Paisley, and whom Willie describes as being recently widowed, old, and with white hair (*WH* 157), a description that fits Jenkins himself in the years preceding the publication of *Willie Hogg*. Moreover, the poem that is read by Willie at Maggie's funeral and in the novel's final scene, called 'What has she lost?' (*WH* 166), is part of the novel and therefore written

by Jenkins himself, and accordingly it seems that Jenkins has slipped himself (the poet with the white hair) into his own plot, as being a character that has some influence on events. In light of this, it seems likely that the poem was actually written by Jenkins after his own wife died. The poem thus adds to the self-reflective quality of the novel while also strengthening the comparison between Jenkins and Willie Hogg as united by their loss.

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Poor Angus tells the story of Angus McAllister, a painter who has returned to Scotland from Basah²⁶ in the Far East to find inspiration for masterpieces on his native Hebridean island, Flodday.²⁷ He is befriended by Janet Maxwell, who has second sight and wants to have an affair with Angus to avenge herself on her unfaithful, golf-fanatic husband. Janet signifies only the beginning of Angus's troubles, as two former mistresses from his years abroad, Nell Ballantyne and Fidelia Gomez, suddenly appear at his doorstep, and subsequently the husbands of Janet, Nell and Fidelia also arrive on Flodday. The novel is a tragi-comedy, focusing on Angus's rejection of Fidelia and his failure to support her in her fight to keep her daughter from her powerful Manila racketeer husband Gomez. Reminiscent of the fate of Andrew McAndrick in 'Imelda and the Miserly Scot', the selfish Angus ultimately gets his comeuppance as Fidelia murders him with a primitive blowpipe he had kept as souvenir from his life in the Far East.

Angus McAllister seems a strange mix of many of Jenkins's other characters such as Alastair Campbell of *A Figure of Fun*, the eponymous hero of *Fergus Lamont*, and Mungo Niven of *A Very Scotch Affair*. Like these characters, Angus, despite his idealism, is selfish, arrogant, vain, prejudiced, sexist, and lacks genuine compassion for other people. Moreover, other characters, such as Nell and Fidelia, are reminiscent of characters from Jenkins's foreign fiction. Both Nell and Fidelia are cast in the role of (former) mistresses of the Scottish protagonist like their earlier counterparts in *The Expatriates* and 'Imelda and the Miserly Scot'. Douglas Gifford makes a similar connection between *Poor Angus* and Jenkins's other fiction, arguing that it is 'as though Jenkins wants to make a parodic comedy of his various kinds of fiction, with tragedy sneaking in in absurd fashion to undercut all expectations'.²⁸ This said, Angus is different from most of Jenkins's other protagonists—excluding Lynedoch of *The Sardana Dancers* and Fergus Lamont—in that he is an artist, and Angus's characteristics, negative or otherwise, and his perspective on art and artistic merit is significant to Jenkins's presentation of human moral behaviour as well as in relation to his portrayal of Scotland and Scottish culture. Like *The Sardana Dancers*, *Poor Angus* tackles the role of the artist and his place within and without Scotland, but here the artist seeks inspiration within his home country instead of abroad, and thus Angus's art shows a complete reversal of Jenkins's earlier presentation of Lynedoch's search for artistic shelter and inspiration outside of Scotland.

The prescript to the novel (Milton's 'In my own country where I most desire') is very appropriate to both Angus's situation and to Jenkins's own writing career. Several aspects of Angus's life are comparable to Jenkins's own, which perhaps has caused Manfred Malzahn's definition of Angus as an 'author surrogate'.²⁹ To say the least, the novel appears highly self-reflective. Thus we are told of Angus's return to Scotland as inspiration for his art:

He had painted scenes more exotic than these, in a far-off part of the world, but here the bright green grass and the rocks made smooth by tide and wind, were kin to his own flesh and bones, for he too had been created on this island, 43 years ago. Whenever he painted it, whether the myriads of flowers on the machair or the puffins on the sea cliffs or the Celtic crosses in the abandoned graveyards, he was trying to convey his love and loyalty, as well as the ... longings of his soul. It was a pity, therefore, though hardly a surprise, that his fellow islanders dismissed his work as gaudy smudges and him as an eccentric fraud. (PA 3-4)

Jenkins himself returned from abroad after portraying scenes 'more exotic' than those of Scotland, and he does perhaps feel that his fiction has been under-estimated by his compatriots. The description of the islanders' dismissal of Angus's art is highly ironic, and thus—characteristically—Jenkins may even be poking fun at himself in this passage. Is Flodday perhaps an ironic symbol of Scotland itself? Is Jenkins drawing a parallel between the lack of recognition of his own work, on one hand, and the islanders' lack of respect for Angus's art, on the other? Reading the novel in this way shows that it conveys a subtle comment on Jenkins's own development as an artist and his place as such within Scotland. The Scottish artist has returned home, determined to portray Scotland in even truer colours than before, and with a fresh, detached view of his country gained through his travelling experiences. He is disappointed with the reception of his art in Scotland, but nevertheless perseveres in portraying aspects of his country in his own highly idiosyncratic manner. He perseveres in his conviction that Scotland, despite its many shortcomings, is a worthy subject of art. Like Jenkins, Angus does receive some recognition from the critics: 'He had been mentioned in a *Herald* review as an interesting new painter. The boldness of his colours, "the influence of the tropics" particularly in his portraits of women, had been noticed' (PA 4). Like Jenkins also, Angus has spent a number of years in the tropical Sabah working as a teacher.

Even when analysing aspects of character and plot as separate from the author's own history, it is evident that the narrative soon poses serious questions concerning the nature of art. Through Angus's perspective, artistic talent is perceived as a sign of grace, thus justifying the true artist's show of selfishness and cruelty to other people, even his loved ones. Thinking of his relationship with the fiercely Catholic Fidelia, Angus senses his own dispassionate detachment from her suffering: '... he had looked upon her agonies

of conscience not so much with a lover's sympathy as with an artist's curiosity. Only if he produced masterpieces could such colossal callousness be justified' (*PA* 28). This view is later echoed through the viewpoint of Nell Ballantyne after Angus's imminent betrayal of Fidelia for the sake of Art becomes evident:

Yet if Rembrandt, say, had been asked to choose between giving up his painting or betraying a woman he loved, and he had chosen the latter he would have proved himself a good man but the world would have lost many masterpieces. To say that Angus was hardly a Rembrandt would be unfair. There had been a time when Rembrandt was unrecognised. (*PA* 175)

Angus claims that artists and writers have to use people: 'They know it's despicable sometimes but, if they don't do it, they won't learn and, if they don't learn, they can't paint or write and there would be no masterpieces' (*PA* 201). Being an artist sets you aside while you also use other people to achieve artistic perfection. The novel therefore asks whether artistic merit justifies the means by which artistic perfection is achieved. As Gavin Miller suggests, Angus regards himself 'as having been fated to an inescapable immortality'.³⁰ Reminiscent of Calvinist notions of grace and election, Angus McAllister feels 'justified' in betraying the only woman he ever loved in the name of Art.

However, the narrative maintains a clear ambivalence in its portrayal of Angus and his art. There are episodes in which we feel genuinely sorry for Angus, as in the scene where he wonders whether a part of his reason for objecting to marriage is that he is afraid of experiencing the same kind of grief as he felt at his mother's death. Angus is thereby sacrificing the kind of happiness that can be achieved through marriage and family life. In this context, the novel questions whether it is worth sacrificing one's own and other people's happiness for the sake of Art, as does Angus. As it turns out, Angus's sacrifice (or punishment) is even greater than that of living a lonely and loveless life on an island for the rest of his life. He pays for his past and present selfishness with his own life. But while the reader may feel sympathetic towards Angus's artistic endeavours, he or she is bound to dislike the protagonist for his arrogance and callousness towards other people, especially women. In relation to this, the novel suggests that, for all his intimations of immortality and artistic greatness, Angus is really, at the end of the day, 'poor' in spiritual, emotional, and moral terms. Carol Birch's definition of Angus supports this view:

Jenkins gives little away about the inner demons of his curiously insubstantial hero, who comes across as a flamboyant nonentity, self-obsessed and emotionally repressed. So bland is he that it is difficult to fathom what all these women see in him.³¹

The ironic and ambiguous title certainly points towards this view of the protagonist. On the one hand, we may feel sorry for him and say: '*poor* Angus, he is really having a hard time'; on the other hand, his general behaviour in the story, and his attitude towards

women especially, show up the poverty of his soul. The true value of Angus's art is therefore undermined and questioned via the novel's portrayal of his selfish nature. As suggested by Ruth Thomas: 'His [Angus's] dismissive summing-up of others, particularly women, revealed his true identity. Beneath the exterior of the great painter who found inspiration in his female muses lay an egotistical womaniser'.³²

Poor Angus is perhaps not among Jenkins's greatest achievements. Jenkins does not delve very deep into Angus's psychology, so that he seems an unconvincing protagonist at times, although this may symbolically reflect Angus's essentially shallow nature. Moreover, Birch argues that the novel's characters 'often seem out of kilter with the modern world' and that despite his 'talent and sly skill ... [Jenkins's] style can be lazy'.³³ Even so, it is interesting to consider *Poor Angus* because its different approach both balances and inverts Jenkins's former presentations of Scotland and the exotic. In this context, *Poor Angus* is arguably a kind of cross-over between the categories of Jenkins's Scottish and foreign fiction. This is established through a number of narrative features. First of all, the facts that the novel takes place in Scotland and that its preface refers all the way back to an essay written in 1955 confirm Jenkins's renewed, 'post-foreign' passion to write about his native country, and yet the foreign element is of major importance to plot developments. Secondly, the novel presents a Scottish artist who has returned to Scotland in order to make masterpieces of art during his isolated stay on the island of Flodday. This is especially significant when considering Jenkins's own final return to Scotland as subject matter for his art, which is manifested in the third period of his writing. Thirdly, instead of taking Scotland to the 'exotic', Jenkins here brings the 'exotic' to Scotland, in the form of Angus's past life in Basah (an alternative reality presented through narrative flashbacks) and in the form of his ex-mistress, the Filipino Fidelia. Thus, instead of concerning itself with the Scot who is unable to escape his background and native confusions through foreign experience—as is revealed in many of Jenkins's former Scots abroad—this novel focuses on a Scot returned home who is unable to escape the moral consequences of the life he led while abroad. Angus's past comes back to haunt him in the form of Nell Ballantyne and Fidelia Gomez, and it is especially Fidelia who is important in this respect, as she, and Angus's refusal to help her, remind him and us of his deepest inadequacy, which is his cowardice in the face of colour prejudice.

Endnotes

- ¹ A version of my discussion of *Poor Angus* was presented at the *Region and Nation* conference in Östersund, Sweden, in August 2000. The paper is presently awaiting publication.
- ² See Horst Prillinger, *Family and the Scottish Working Class Novel 1984-1994: A study of novels by Janice Galloway, Alasdair Gray, Robin Jenkins, James Kelman, A. L. Kennedy, William McIlvanney, Agnes Owens, Alan Spence, and George Friel* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000) 145-156.
- ³ Prillinger 150.
- ⁴ This analogy between Sempill and 'simple' is made evident in the novel: one of the locals points out that Mr Sempill's name should have been Simple because of his 'well-meaning but stupid interference' in the local council's debate on the tinker problem (PC 98).
- ⁵ See Douglas Gifford, 'Scottish Fiction: Old and New Masters', *Books in Scotland* 39 (Autumn 1991): 5; and Glenda Norquay, 'Disruptions: The Later Fiction of Robin Jenkins', *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*, ed. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) 15.
- ⁶ Prillinger 149, 152, 154, 155.
- ⁷ *ibid* 152.
- ⁸ *ibid* 149.
- ⁹ *ibid* 154.
- ¹⁰ *ibid* 153.
- ¹¹ Norquay, 'Disruptions' 15.
- ¹² Prillinger 155-156.
- ¹³ Part of this quote recalls Duffy's 'declaration of war' in *Just Duffy*: 'War is declared on defilers of truth and abusers of authority' (JD 35). There is accordingly a clear resemblance between Donald's view of the world's morality and Duffy's.
- ¹⁴ Norquay, 'Disruptions' 16.
- ¹⁵ *ibid* 12.
- ¹⁶ Robin Jenkins, interview with Glenda Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism', by Glenda Norquay, Ph.D., U of Edinburgh, 1985, 448.
- ¹⁷ *ibid* 448.
- ¹⁸ See Robin Jenkins, 'Novelist in Scotland', *Saltire Review* 5 (1955): 7; Robin Jenkins, 'Why I decided Scotland must be seen through fresh and truthful eyes', *Glasgow Herald* 12 October 1982: 11; Personal Interview 14.
- ¹⁹ See Jenkins, 'Why I decided' 11; and Jenkins, *Willie Hogg* 74.
- ²⁰ See Robin Jenkins, interview, 'The Symbolism of Good and Evil: Studies in the Novels of Robin Jenkins', by Winifride Logan, Diss., U of Glasgow, 1991, 44.
- ²¹ See Jenkins, interview with Norquay 448. Jenkins says: 'Harvey, our white cat, is the most dignified creature under the sun, harms nothing except the odd fieldmouse'.
- ²² Gifford, 'Old and New Masters' 6.
- ²³ Tony Mathieson, "'There was, and perhaps still is, a Christian faith'", *Edinburgh Review* 106 (Spring 2001): 47.
- ²⁴ See Robin Jenkins, 'Cardwell Bay 1937', *Fallen Angels: Paintings by Jack Vettriano*, ed. W. Gordon Smith (London: Pavilion, 1994) 92.
- ²⁵ See Personal Interview 13. Gray's novel is one of Jenkins's own favourite boyhood stories.
- ²⁶ *Basah* is clearly an anagram of *Sabah*, but Jenkins himself lived and taught in Sabah for several years.
- ²⁷ There is no island called Flodday in Scotland, but it is most likely based on Islay, as Jenkins mentioned Islay when discussing the plot of *Poor Angus* with me. See Personal Interview 18.
- ²⁸ Douglas Gifford, 'Second sight of the first order', *The Scotsman* 10 June 2000, sec. S2 Weekend: 9.
- ²⁹ Manfred Malzahn, 'Where Extremes Meet in Midfield: The Aesthetics of Robin Jenkins', *Edinburgh Review* 106 (Spring 2001): 44.
- ³⁰ Gavin Miller, 'Robin Jenkins' *Poor Angus*: Confessions of a Justified Artist', *Edinburgh Review* 106 (Spring 2001): 35.
- ³¹ Carol Birch, 'The island of weird women', rev. of *Poor Angus*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 21 July 2000: 23.
- ³² Ruth Thomas, 'No man is an island', rev. of *Poor Angus*, by Robin Jenkins, *Scotland on Sunday* 23 July 2000, sec. Seven: 14.
- ³³ Birch 23.

Part V: Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to present a comprehensive study of the fiction of Robin Jenkins, specifically focusing on Jenkins's preoccupation with individual self-discovery and the search for moral perfection. Its main objective has been to examine Jenkins's portrayal of those central characters, or 'pilgrims of conscience', whose development highlights the novelist's philosophical perspective on human fallibility and the ambiguous nature of goodness. Such characters are frequently tormented by a strong sense of moral inadequacy, long constantly for spiritual transcendence, and yearn for a level of goodness that overcomes human frailties. Their development towards self-perception often depends on the realisation that, without acceptance of the essentially fallible nature of humankind, they reject their own place within humanity. Throughout his fiction, Jenkins highlights the pitfalls of idealism and the discrepancy between principle and practice, suggesting the essentially self-interested motives behind many so-called gestures of charity. Jenkins's novels emphasise that moral perfection is largely unattainable in a world of economic capitalism, moral selfishness, and spiritual disillusionment. If true goodness is seemingly achieved, it is never presented straightforwardly or unequivocally. The majority of those figures in Jenkins's fiction who appear superior ethically and spiritually are portrayed in highly ambiguous terms, their apparent goodness and religiosity questioned and undermined by the possibility that their motives may be based on arrogance, pride, delusion, or the desire to prove themselves superior to others. True goodness, as exemplified by Calum of the *Cone-Gatherers* and Sammy McShelvie of *Guests of War*, exists only beyond the strictures of social conditioning and seems unattainable in a normal, adult world.

Within the subject frame of moral pilgrimage and the quest for transcendence, the present analysis has also dealt with other aspects of Jenkins's work that are central to his moral perspective, and which are often related to the inner dilemmas of his main characters. Jenkins's critique of class distinction is crucial, but many of the novels emphasise the destructive effects of poverty on individuals who are left with no choice but to endure conditions that defy human dignity and comfort. Poverty is frequently a defining factor in the development of Jenkins's protagonists, many of whom long to escape the oppressive squalor of the slum and to rise in the world. Through his underprivileged characters, and the social contexts within which they operate, Jenkins interrogates the morality of modern capitalist society, highlighting the sheer injustice of a system in which some people live in extravagance while the dispossessed suffer misery and malnourishment in an environment over which they have no control.

In his foreign fiction, Jenkins's social interrogation extends to issues of racial prejudice, cultural conflict, and the dubious legacy of British imperialism. Jenkins questions the morality of imperial ideology, satirises Western assumption of ownership and power in the East, and highlights the negative repercussions of racial prejudice. Most of the characters in Jenkins's foreign narratives are shown to be victims of colonialism. If they are indigenous members of that culture, they are caught between their own culture and the values and habits that have been imposed on their society by Western imperialism, unable to escape their perceived inferiority by denouncing their background or adopting a Western code of behaviour. If they are British, their sensibility is heavily influenced by imperial ideology and its notions of racial superiority, resulting in the fact that, despite their ideals for equality and justice, their lives are deeply affected by their inherent racism.

Overall, Jenkins's fiction has a strong religious focus, and Calvinism is felt throughout to be a strong influence on his Scottish characters' lives and personality. Calvinism is seen to be a fierce, unforgiving, and oppressive force that advocates rigidity and vindictiveness in judgements of human behaviour. Jenkins clearly perceives Calvinism to have left a destructive legacy for both Scotland and the Scottish character, and he repeatedly emphasises, through his character portrayals, the folly of a self-assigned sense of grace, derived from Calvinist ideas of election, that leads to notions of absolute justification. Despite Jenkins's criticism of Calvinist mentality, and regardless of his atheistic views, his fiction is nevertheless haunted by the elusive possibility of spiritual affirmation. It consistently toys with the idea of there being some kind of divine, external influence that governs human life and, considering Jenkins's own atheism, God Himself is an astonishingly strong presence in his novels. Religious symbolism features powerfully in Jenkins's fiction, most notably in the recurrent motif of the sacrificed innocent, whose death usually carries overtones of atonement and redemption, and functions as a focal point for bringing the plot to a moral or spiritual conclusion. Jenkins's approach to religion and spirituality is always ambiguous, however, as it is sometimes uncertain whether his use of Christian motifs is meant to be taken at face value, or if it constitutes an ironic reflection on the dubious relevance of religion to human life.

It is hoped that this study explains Jenkins as a highly complex and sophisticated writer, who approaches his central themes from a variety of perspectives, and whose compassionate engagement with his characters and plot scenarios reveals his deep and intimate understanding of humanity and modern society. It is no surprise that Jenkins prides himself on being an ironist,¹ since irony is a clear hallmark of his writing. His subtle, even elusive, irony contributes further to the complexity of his work. Although many of his narratives appear to be relatively simple, it is Jenkins's irony which disrupts

this apparent simplicity, making it problematic to reach a straightforward interpretation of their underlying meaning. It is a common tendency among Jenkins's readership to overlook his deeply ironic approach, thus failing to appreciate the inherent ambiguity of his work.

This thesis has sought to demonstrate the pertinence of the concept of moral pilgrimage to Jenkins's overall achievement. Examination of humanity's moral inconsistencies and hypocrisies is central to his work and, even as this thesis is in the process of completion, Jenkins's writing continues to extend and develop his exploration of moral capacity. The most recent publication, *Childish Things*, confirms how important the issues of morality and self-knowledge are to Jenkins's literary vision. The protagonist of this novel, Gregor McLeod, is the ultimate pilgrim of conscience. The 72-year-old, recently widowed McLeod wavers between self-interested opportunism and self-flagellation and guilt. One minute he questions his own capacity for genuine despair and grief, the next he fantasises about being involved with rich widows for the sake of their possessions. It soon emerges that McLeod has lived his life in disguise, trying to escape memories of his underprivileged and unhappy childhood. He has put on appearances and even lied to his family about aspects of his past, but the truth of his origin has tormented him all his life. As Carl MacDougall comments, these childish things which McLeod 'has tried to outgrow ... have dominated his life'.² When his Californian filmstar friend hires Glaswegian private detectives to uncover his lies, McLeod eventually has to face up to his past and acknowledge the callousness and moral cowardice that characterised his treatment of his mother. *Childish Things* encapsulates Jenkins's central thematic concerns; it highlights once more the deep-set divisions that lie at the heart of Scottish society and character, explores the issues of familial loyalty and moral fallibility, and charts McLeod's development from betrayal, selfishness and conceit towards self-knowledge and, perhaps, ultimate redemption.

At the same time, *Childish Things* continues the self-reflective movement that characterises Jenkins's more recent work. There are too many parallels between Jenkins himself and Gregor McLeod not to interpret this novel as being, at the very least, partly autobiographical. The summary of McLeod's early life given in the detectives' report (CT 242-247) corresponds closely with Jenkins's own experience. Like Jenkins, McLeod was born in a Lanarkshire mining village, and his father died of rheumatic fever shortly after returning from the Great War. Parallel to Jenkins, McLeod's mother was left to support her children and, like Jenkins, McLeod was a brilliant student and won a bursary to a fee-paying Academy. There are numerous other details that are explicitly autobiographical, but the most striking is the fact that McLeod's birthdate is that of Jenkins himself (CT

243). It therefore appears that Jenkins identifies strongly with the novel's protagonist. Is Jenkins reflecting back on aspects of his life, and does the novel perhaps address his own personal feelings of inadequacy and self-reproach? The explicitly self-reflective nature of *Childish Things* does, at the very least, imply strong authorial involvement with McLeod's guilt over the betrayal of his family and background, and it is interesting to note in this respect that the novel is dedicated to the memory of Jenkins's mother. Jenkins is perhaps himself the quintessential pilgrim of conscience, whose philosophy on the elusive nature of self-knowledge, the fallibility of humanity, and moral ambiguity is derived from the keen interrogation of his own moral inadequacies. Indeed, Jenkins's comment that 'Novelists who seek to study the virtues and vices of humanity find them all most readily in themselves'³ would seem to reinforce the validity of this view. Bernard Sellin has similarly conjectured:

if you consider the entire work there is such consistency that one can detect the author's involvement in most of his books in one form or another, as if Jenkins' moral questioning also applied to himself. It is undeniable that many of the tensions found in the books originate in the author's own doubts or rather honesty.⁴

Childish Things can be read as the culmination of such authorial honesty, an uncompromising self-analysis which simultaneously extends to the universal nature of human morality.

Robin Jenkins is certainly among the greatest Scottish novelists of the twentieth, and now twenty-first, century. Yet, although he has recently been praised as Scotland's senior, most distinguished writer,⁵ as 'one of Scotland's finest contemporary writers',⁶ and as 'one of the great novelists in English',⁷ his extraordinary achievement has been shamefully and undeservedly neglected within both the Scottish and the British literary context. While critics such as Glenda Norquay, Cairns Craig, Bernard Sellin, Isobel Murray, Douglas Gifford, and Francis Hart emphasise the importance of his work, criticism that deals with Jenkins's writing is generally too short or limited in scope to consider the totality of his fiction. Except for Norquay's doctoral thesis and a number of university dissertations, the critical material cited throughout this study consists of individual essays, reviews, or books in which short sections discussing Jenkins are found. In this diverse and diffuse body of work, critics recurrently emphasise how Jenkins's work is unjustly neglected, and some have enthusiastically called for a major reappraisal of his achievement. In 1985, Isobel Murray suggested a collected edition of Jenkins's work, claiming that his novels 'have been and are absurdly, even scandalously, neglected, by critics, publishers, and the reading public alike'.⁸ Needless to say, a collected edition of Jenkins's fiction has not yet been published, a fact that reflects and underlines the marginal

public and academic recognition which Jenkins has been accorded in his own country. In 1998, Paul Binding rightly commented that Jenkins's 'true stature has not been properly recognised',⁹ while in 1997, Douglas Gifford enthused that the time was 'long overdue for a major reassessment of the work of Robin Jenkins',¹⁰ reiterating this claim after the publication of *Poor Angus* in 2000.¹¹ Yet, despite the enthusiasm of Jenkins's critics to see this realised, no comprehensive or book-length study of Jenkins's *oeuvre* has yet been published. Accordingly, this thesis aims at providing a much needed, long overdue and detailed critical discussion of the entire range of Jenkins's work in order to fill a significant gap in modern Scottish and British literary criticism.

Endnotes

- ¹ From an unpublished part of Personal Interview, 21 March 1997.
- ² Carl MacDougall, 'The early years, late woe', rev. of *Childish Things*, by Robin Jenkins, *The Herald* 5 May 2001, sec. Weekend Living: 13.
- ³ Robin Jenkins, *The writer on writing, The Cone-Gatherers*, by Robin Jenkins (Harlow: Longman, 1991) viii.
- ⁴ Bernard Sellin, 'Commitment and Betrayal: Robin Jenkins' *A Very Scotch Affair*', *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996) 99.
- ⁵ See editorial heading to Personal Interview.
- ⁶ Eleanor Morton, 'Easily led by his creations', *The Herald* 12 February 1999: 24.
- ⁷ Douglas Gifford, 'Spring Fiction: Dreams of Love and Justice', *Books in Scotland* 57 (Spring 1996): 12.
- ⁸ Isobel Murray, 'One Toe in Eden Still: Robin Jenkins' Fiction', *Scottish Review* 38 (1985): 88-95.
- ⁹ Paul Binding, 'Liberating the Elect', rev. of *Matthew and Sheila*, by Robin Jenkins, *Times Literary Supplement* 18 December 1998: 20.
- ¹⁰ Douglas Gifford, 'Summer Fiction: Ambiguities and Ironies', *Books in Scotland* 82 (Summer 1997): 1.
- ¹¹ Douglas Gifford, 'Second sight of the first order', rev. of *Poor Angus*, by Robin Jenkins, *The Scotsman* 10 June 2000, sec. S2 Weekend: 9.

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